



University  
of Basel

# AUDILE SCARIFICATION

Lecture Series: New Developments in Theory

## ON CULTURES OF LOUDNESS AND THE NORMALIZATION OF HEARING DAMAGE

Prof. Jonathan Sterne, McGill University

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Englisches Seminar, Grosser Hörsaal  
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# AUDILE SCARIFICATION ON CULTURES OF LOUDNESS AND THE NORMALIZATION OF HEARING DAMAGE

Blending cultural theory, disability studies, and participant audition, this paper argues that high volumes produced in a range of cultural contexts—from amplifiers at concerts to hand dryers in bathrooms—are best understood as a distinctive form of cultural practice: scarification of the middle ear. Walking the line between concepts of “hearing loss” and “deaf gain,” this paper analyzes high volume listening as a form of collective participation and belonging, both voluntary and involuntary. Loud acoustic cultures modify the structure of hearing both at the instant of audition and subsequently through repeated participation. Through a consideration of spaces of loudness, as well as practices of auditory prophylaxis, this paper attempts to move beyond both the false consciousness models still prevalent in much of the public health literature, and more semiotically-based approaches that treat loudness first as a form of signification.

**Jonathan Sterne** is Professor and James McGill Chair in Culture and Technology in the Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University. He is author of *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Duke 2012), *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Duke, 2003), and numerous articles on media, technologies, and the politics of culture. He is also editor of *The Sound Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2012). His new projects consider instruments and instrumentalities; mail by cruise missile; and the intersections of disability, technology, and perception. Visit his website at <http://sternetworks.org>.