

Film 420:403 – Sound Design (Spring 2008)

Instructor: Alex Moeller, amoeller@uwm.edu

Class Meeting Time: Monday, Wednesday 3PM – 4:50PM; KSE 416

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Office Hours: Monday, 5PM - 7PM (or by appointment)

Film Department Office: Mitchell B70, 414.229.6015

What is for the eye must not duplicate what is for the ear.

– Robert Bresson

Course Objectives:

As with any course on sound, we must first be asked to listen. It is largely a conceptual task, but we will quickly find it is also a necessary (and practical) one when working with visual media. If we are to take Bresson's aforementioned challenge seriously, it seems there is a presumption about sound in visual media: namely, it is subordinated by the presence of the image. Why? How might sound inform the image, if not change our understanding of it?

In this class we will look at different ways of creating, recording, and presenting works of sound including synthesis, field recording, and multi-channel pieces. Conversely, we will discuss the conceptual and technical aspects of the work of artists such as Walter Murch, John Cage, Aaron Zimm, Alvin Lucier, Pauline Oliveros, and Pierre Schaeffer. Trips to galleries displaying sound art, screenings, weekly listenings, and participation in discussion of class work are expected. Through small exercises in sound design using Logic, we will conclude the semester with either a sound film/video, or a 5.1 channel sound piece.

There is only one caveat: all recordings gathered and used in this course must be our own, in that we can verify our source material. If, at one extreme, you desperately need to use a recorded song in a composition, you must first record it through a microphone, and then apply that recording to your project.

Required Supplies:

- A handful of AA batteries
- CDs and/or DVDs for backup
- (3) 74 or 80 minute Standard Minidiscs: available at Best Buy or from Riverwest Film & Video Co-op (824 E. Center) or on-line (www.tapeandmedia.com)

Required Text:

Chion, Michel. Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen (Trans. Claudia Gorbman, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994).

* Available at Amazon.com

Recommended Texts: (additional readings will be assigned as needed, and will likely come as a weblink sent to your email account)

Altman, Rick (ed.). Sound Theory Sound Practice (London, Routledge, 1992)

Ondaatje, Michael. Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film (Knopf, 2002)

Weis, Elisabeth. Film Sound: Theory and Practice (New York, Columbia University Press, 1985)

Attendance:

We will be addressing quite a bit of material, so attendance is mandatory. After a total of three (3) unexcused absences, your grade will drop an entire letter. Additional missed classes will each result in another drop by half a grade. In short: Do not miss class. If you suspect a class will be missed, contact me as soon as possible so as to make arrangements.

Assignments:

The course will largely focus on designing and realizing a high quality, stereo (or 5.1 channel) soundtrack for a short film, video, or installation. Your soundtrack can be for an existing film/video or for a project in-progress as long as it will be finished by the end of the semester. Projects from 2-6 minutes in duration are recommended; no projects may be over 10 minutes in length. There will be a series of "check-points" throughout the semester that will ask you to present your work in progress. Your ability to meet these check-points will be included in the allocation of your final project grade.

- Class participation and graduate presentation (15%)
- Two technical assignments:
- Final Project (40%)

- **Equipment Access/Checkout:** NT-4/NH-900 HiMD sound kits are readily available, and each individual should have access throughout the course of the semester. Additional mics and recording kits will be addressed in the course, but you will mostly be using the NT-4 kits. Still, the number of equipment is limited -- please be respectful of all equipment room policies. Failure to do so will result in a loss of privileges to equipment access.

- **Facility Access & Work Permits:**

Students using department facilities in Mitchell Hall must have an updated work permit, which will be distributed in class. The Film Dept facilities are normally open from 9am-4:30pm Monday-Friday. Some of the studios have card-swipe access. Keys for other editing rooms and studios may be signed out in the Equipment Room or B70 office. When the Film Office is closed, access to rooms is available from department staff or campus police, following posted guidelines.

Our class will be held in Kenilworth, so you must get handscan access immediately. The Box Office in the Zelazo Center will do this for you.

Schedule:

Jan. 23: Introduction, welcomes, active listening

- Selections from Hildegard Westerkamp, Aaron Zimm, Robin Storey

Check out: <http://www.quietamerican.org/>

<http://www.sfu.ca/~westerka/>

Jan. 28: Demo: NT-4 Field Kits and Micing Technique
Microphones, and how they do what they do

Jan. 30: A brief history on sound design

Read: Sound Production in Film

<http://www.mtsu.edu/~smpte/timeline.html>

Assignment: Break into groups of three over the weekend, and record three sound events (1 minute each).

Feb. 4: Musique Concrete

Works by Pierre Schaeffer, Steve Reich, Hildegard Westerkamp, and The Beatles

DUE: Bring in group recordings from over the weekend

Feb. 6: Demo: Recording voice in the soundbooth
Logic and basic sound editing

Feb. 11: Sound and Cinema

Read: Chion, "Foreword by Walter Murch" and pg. 3-24

Screening: Persona, The Thin Red Line

Demo: Logic

Feb. 13: Sound and Cinema

Screening: Works by Andrei Tarkovsky

Demo: Logic and filters

Assignment: Readymade sound design

Feb. 18: Read: Chion, pg. 25-34

Screening: Works by Godard, Hitchcock

Demo: Logic and equalization

Feb. 20: Read: Chion, pg. 35-65

Presentations on reading

Demo: Logic

Feb. 25: **Check-point:** Presentation of final project proposals, including footage or sound examples

Feb. 27: **DUE:** Readymade sound design

March 3: Read: Chion, pg. 66-94

Screening: Works by Leighton Pierce, Joan Jonas

March 5: **Field Trip:** Anechoic chamber

March 10: Demo: Multi-channel mixing in Logic

Assignment: 5.1 channel mix of The Karate Kid

March 12: Demo: Multi-channel mixing in Logic

March 17-19: **Spring Break**

March 24: Read: Chion, pg. 95-122

Screening: The Bear

Demo: Multi-channel mixing in Logic

March 26: Focus on illusion

Works by zoviet:france, Rapoon, Janet Stein

March 31: Demo: Aging technology in the age of plasticity

Naagra, DAT, Sennheiser

April 2: **DUE:** 5.1 channel mix of The Karate Kid

April 7: **Individual Meetings**

April 9: **Individual Meetings**

April 14: Check-point: In-progress presentations

April 16: In-progress presentations continued

April 21: Works in progress

April 23: Works in progress

April 28: Works in progress

April 30: Works in progress

May 5: Works in progress

May 7: Works in progress

May 14: Final Projects Due

E-mail:

Upon occasion, I may wish to contact you via your UWM account. Please attempt to either check mail at this account regularly, or to forward mail sent to your UWM account to a more readily used one.

Additional Course and Departmental Policies:

Department of Film Policies: Available online: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/Acad_Aff/sylpol.html.

Special Needs and Questions: If you need special accommodations to meet any of the requirements of this course, please contact the instructor as soon as possible. Feel free to visit with me to discuss assignments or any questions/requests you have.

Accommodation for Religious Observances: Students will be allowed to complete examinations or other requirements that are missed because of a religious observance.

Policy on Course Drops, Incompletes: No drops are permitted after the 5th week of the semester. Incompletes will be considered ONLY for situations in which you are maintaining a "B" or better grade at the end of classes, and you are unable, because of illness or other extenuating circumstances beyond your control, to complete your course work. You must provide written documentation to the instructor indicating that you were prevented from completing your course requirements. You must complete course work for an Incomplete during the first eight weeks of the next semester of enrollment (excluding summer sessions). Access to dept facilities for the purpose of completing course requirements is extended into the next semester.