HDCC208E: Seminar in Digital Cultures & Creativity: Digital Music and Sound, Fall 2012
Tues/Thurs 3:30-4:45pm • Women’s Studies Multimedia Studio, University of Maryland
Instructor: Dr. Tara Rodgers • www.analogtara.net

Course Description

Digital music and sound is all around us. In this seminar, we will assess it as a historical and cultural phenomenon, learn to interpret some of its many meanings, and embrace it as a creative medium. The course will survey the history of digital audio and electronic musical genres alongside hands-on explorations of associated technologies. We will read about, listen to, and discuss creative work in DJing, hip hop, electronic and experimental music genres. We will engage debates around technological progress, authorship, ownership, and community formation which are integral to digital media and cultures. In both collaborative and individual projects, students will develop skills in digital music production using free or low-cost software such as the audio editor Audacity and sound apps for iPads.* Upon completion of the course, students will be conversant in historical and cultural dimensions of digital music and sound, and able to complete creative projects using sound as a primary mode of expression.

*Each student has access to an iPad through the DCC program and to two shared iMac workstations and audio equipment in the WMST Studio.

I. Introductions to Digital Music and Sound

Thurs Aug 30 – Greetings; Course Overview
Read and consider the “Read, Write, Cite” document.

Tues Sept 4 – Culture and Technology
Slack, Jennifer Daryl, and J. Macgregor Wise, *Culture + Technology: A Primer.* “Section I: Culture and Technology: The Received View – Progress, Convenience, Determinism, Control” (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 9-64.

Thurs Sept 6 – Hearing and Listening

In class:
Watch excerpts of TEDTalk: “Evelyn Glennie Shows How to Listen”:
http://www.ted.com/talks/evelyn_glennie_shows_how_to_listen.html
Tues Sept 11 – Music and Sound in Context: Beeps, Sports, Campaigns
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/21/magazine/21FOB-medium-t.html (Read and check out media examples)
Sullivan, Becky. “Making The Olympics Sound Right, From a ‘Swoosh’ to a ‘Splash’,” All Things Considered, NPR, July 28, 2012 (5 min. 54 sec)  
http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetorch/2012/07/28/157442046/making-the-olympics-sound-right-from-a-swoosh-to-a-splash (Listen to the story or read text with audio examples)

Recommended:

In class:
Descriptive writing exercise

Thurs Sept 13 – Sound and Digital Audio Basics

In class:
Quiz on Huber & Runstein and Roads
File format and speaker/headphone comparisons

II. Digital Music Production

Tues Sept 18 – Microphone Techniques

Recommended:

In class:
Microphone demos; Tascam digital recorders
Thurs Sept 20 – Electronic Musical Instruments: Histories and Futures

Recommended:

** Reading Response #1 due **

In class:
Electronic music instrument history
Review subtractive, additive, and wavetable synthesis
Explore Björk’s Biophilia – buy and install app before class; bring iPads to class and headphones if you have them

Tues Sept 25 – Introduction to Audacity; iPad apps; Work Session

In class:
Audacity & iPad instrument demos
Discuss & begin Group Project #1 – Create a sample library (“pack”) for Freesound.org
Assignment objectives: Critical listening; collaborative creativity; recording and exporting audio files at correct levels; making clean edits; using fades

Thurs Sept 27 – Group Project #1 – Work Session

Tues Oct 2 – ** Group Project #1 due ** – Presentations and Discussion

Thurs Oct 4 – Sampling: History, Aesthetics, Politics

In class:
Sampling discussion
Mix assignment distributed
Assignment objectives: Multitrack editing and mixdown; effective use of panning and effects; careful crafting of a sonic or musical “narrative” over the designated length of time.
**Tues Oct 9 – Sampling and Mash-ups (cont’d)**

Watch:
*Scratch* hip hop documentary

** Reading Response #2 due **

**Thurs Oct 11 – Mixing Techniques and Work Session**

In class:
Mixing lecture; Introductions to Traktor and Ableton Live

**Tues Oct 16 – Mixing Work Session**
Ableton Live demo videos TBA

**Thurs Oct 18 – Mixing Work Session**

**Tues Oct 23 – Mix Presentations and Critique**
** Mix due in Dropbox folder by 1 pm **

**Thurs Oct 25 – Mix Presentations and Critique (cont’d)**
III. Listening in a “Digital Age”

**Tues Oct 30 – Digital Formats and Distribution**

**Recommended:**

In class:
Digital music ownership debate
Discuss digital distribution formats: Soundcloud, Bandcamp, podcasts, more…

**Thurs Nov 1 – Complete Mobile Listening exercise and response**

**Reading Response #3 due**

**IV. Sound, Space, and Experience**

**Tues Nov 6 – Sound and Space**

**Recommended:**

In class:
Review mobile listening assignment
Introduce multichannel sound installations and Group Project #2
**Thurs Nov 8 – Introduction to Sound Art and Data Sonification**
Additional short readings and URLs TBA

In class:
Sound art examples
Introduce Group Project #2 – Sound Installation Art – Work Session

**Tues Nov 13 – Group Project #2 – Work Session**

**Thurs Nov 15 – Group Project #2 ** Presentations due in class **

**Fri Nov 16 – ** Final project proposal due via email by 5pm **

**Tues Nov 20 – Individual meetings to discuss final project proposals**

**Thurs Nov 22 – NO CLASS – Thanksgiving holiday**

**Tues Nov 27 – Sound, Bodies, and Power**

** Reading Response #4 due **

**Thurs Nov 29 – TBA – Final Project Individual Meetings / Work Session**

**Tues/Thurs Dec 4/6 – TBA – Work Sessions ? Presentations ?**

**Tues Dec 11 – LAST DAY OF CLASSES – Presentations**
** Final projects due by 9PM Tues Dec 11 **