

Media Aesthetics: SOUND
HUMA 16200
Spring 2021

Course Instructor

<>. Course Materials

-W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Penguin)

-Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (Vintage)

-Follow this link to order the two required books for our class:

<https://www.semcoop.com/coursebooks>

Video game

- *Discovery Tour: Ancient Greece* (2019) by Ubisoft

https://store.ubi.com/us/game/?lang=en_US&pid=5d4040cd5cdf9a07d09464ac&dwyar_5d4040cd5cdf9a07d09464ac_Platform=pcdl&edition=Ancient%20Greece&source=detail

<>. Course Event

Vocal lesson and demonstration by jazz vocalist Alyssa Allgood. (TBD)

<>. Course Policies and Requirements

You are expected to attend every class and be on time.

Reminder: preparation is a part of attendance: in order to be present in class, and in order to participate, you need to have read that day's assigned text and/or listened/viewed the media object.

- Discussion: Participatory and Collaborative Learning

As this is not a lecture course, you are expected to come not only having read the assignments, but ready to discuss the readings and participate in class.

A key goal of the course is creating a space for you that facilitates the process of "learning how to learn". This process includes two components, inside and outside the classroom: in class (synchronously), you will be asked to work collaboratively with your peers, outside you will post to the discussion board on Canvas (asynchronously).

- Group Discussions on Zoom and Canvas: Discussant and Respondent

You will participate in discussion with your group in one of two roles: as discussant or respondent. You will assume one or another of these roles in the class. **You will be a discussant THREE times per quarter.** Each group (of about 6 students) will have two discussants, and the rest will be respondents.

If you are a respondent, you are required to post at least **TWICE** per quarter (though preferably more). In total, you should have at least **FIVE** posts per quarter in your role as discussant and respondent.

Please refer to the full handout for pointers, hints, and guidelines on acting as discussant or respondent in your respective group.

Discussions take place within a group (between discussants and respondents), and also collectively in the class, between different groups. The latter are discussions involving all students in the class. Different group units exchange and compare notes, observations, interpretations, and so on (during the class session), with the purpose of advancing our understanding of the objects we take up on a given day.

There are different types of discussions that you will participate in:

Some will be **interpretive discussions**: for example, figuring out the meaning of a passage in a text, or the main points of an argument in an article. Some discussions will involve close reading and analysis of a painting, a photograph, or a scene from a film, and so on.

A second kind of discussion involves **position-taking discussions** (groups take different points of view on a topic or point in a reading and debate it with each other). Positions may also be switched or reversed. Our goal in doing this discussion format will be to practice a dialectical mode of argument: you arrive at what you think by mediating your view socially in communication, taking into consideration what others also think about the topic. This does not necessarily mean agreement or disagreement with others (although it may be that), but more of a *working through* of your ideas in conjunction with those of your classmates. Your ideas grow by mediation through the ideas of others. You will produce better and stronger arguments over time as you allow your ideas to develop and grow. And you will gain deeper insights into the subject matter. Better arguments take into consideration the views, and often the *objections*, of other interlocutors. This dialectical mode of discussion will also prepare you to write better paper assignments. You will construct your papers by mediating your arguments through the critical perspectives you encounter in the readings. Also, through dialectical modes of argument and reasoning, you will learn to assess the contradictions and shifts in argument in a text or point of view more effectively.

In addition to group discussion, there will be description and observation activities: of sounds or music and arguments. To describe sounds effectively, you will need to consider the technical terms (or **conceptual keywords**) which are specific to the

medium you are describing. In doing the readings for class, you always want to look for these main concepts (keywords). They are the tools that will help us to address media objects in the class (with often surprising interpretive results!).

There will be “application-of-keywords” discussion activities in class. So when you read a text, think about how you would apply the keywords from that text to the media objects we are investigating or considering.

Most importantly, don’t be afraid to change your mind or shift your point of view. Be open to others as you also work to develop your own unique perspective. Experimenting with ideas and thoughts is a good way to grow as a learner: someone seeking a deeper understanding and appreciation of their media experience, and that of others.

-Please refer to the “Modules” page on Canvas where I have provided a list of suggestions for your contributions as discussants and respondents.

Posting video comments via Panopto

Panopto (available in Canvas) gives you the capacity to make time-stamped notes. You can use it to write a comment on visual materials for class (e.g. a film scene, a photograph, or a painting). Once you make your comment in a video, you can share it with your classmates. Consider using Panopto for making your discussion posts as a discussant or a respondent, at least some of the time. For instructions follow this link: https://uchicago.service-now.com/it?id=kb_article&kb=KB06000843

- Paper Assignments

You will write 3 papers for the course, on which most of your grade (75%) is based.

- Extensions: you may request up to **5 extension days per paper assignment** should you need some extra time (due to other pressing work or illness). However, please note that if you need an extension, you must email me in advance of the due date. Failure to do so will result in your paper being marked late, and grade deductions.

- Writing Seminars

Also, you are required and expected to attend the **writing seminars**. Absence from these will result in penalties which will impact your overall course grade.

- Grading

Attendance + Participation: 25%

Paper #1 (900 words): 20%

Paper #2 (1000 words): 25%

Final Paper (1500 words): 30%

- Optional Activities

-Course Notes and Journal/Blog

Record your reading notes and other observations in a course blog or journal. This helps you to keep track of your own thoughts as they develop over the quarter. And you can use this material for participating in the discussions on Canvas and in class, and also for crafting your paper assignments.

- Academic dishonesty and plagiarism

It is your responsibility to ensure that all of your written work conforms to accepted standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is not only copying others' work; any improperly documented use of ideas can constitute plagiarism. Please consult the discussion of plagiarism and academic honesty in *Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success*, which you will be given by your writing instructor. It is crucial that you are familiar with these standards, and it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with them. If these standards are in any way unclear to you, please consult with me. **Academic dishonesty is a very serious offense, even if it is unintentional. Any form of academic dishonesty may result in immediate failure of this course and disciplinary action.**

- Recording Policy

By attending course sessions, students acknowledge that:

1. They will not: (i) record, share, or disseminate University of Chicago course sessions, videos, transcripts, audio, or chats; (ii) retain such materials after the end of the course; or (iii) use such materials for any purpose other than in connection with participation in the course.
2. They will not share links to University of Chicago course sessions with any persons not authorized to be in the course session. Sharing course materials with persons authorized to be in the relevant course is permitted. Syllabi, handouts, slides, and other documents may be shared at the discretion of the instructor.
3. Course recordings, content, and materials may be covered by copyrights held by the University, the instructor, or third parties. Any unauthorized use of such recordings or course materials may violate such copyrights.
4. Any violation of this policy will be referred to the Area Dean of Students.

- Accessibility

I am committed to ensuring that all students can fully participate in class. If you have a documented disability and require accommodation for this course, please provide me with a copy of your Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Service office) so that we can begin discussing how you can best thrive through this course. If your disability is not registered but you have, or believe you may have, a disability, contact the office at 773-702- 6000/TTY 773-795-1186 or disabilities@uchicago.edu, or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu. If you need help navigating these services, please let me know.

Key Questions for the Sound Quarter

- What is a sound? Where do sounds come from?
- How can you appreciate, describe or theorize a sound?
- How are sounds different from images and texts? How is hearing different from looking or reading?
- Do sounds have histories? Do sounds belong in places?
- What is the difference between sound and noise? What is silence?
- What is a voice? What is “voice” in writing?
- Why do sounds taunt, beguile and lure? What is *beauty* in listening?
- What’s the relationship between words and notes? How can music *represent*? What does music say to us, and how do we know?
- How does sound inform other forms of literary and visual representation?
- How do media technologies alter (or invent) the aesthetic of a sound?
- What is the relationship between sound and language in song and poetry?

Class Schedule

Week 1 (March 29) I. Sound: Medium and Form / System and Environment

- 1A -“Narcissus and Echo” from Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, (pp.104-110).
 -Emily Dickinson, “To Hear an Oriole Sing,” “Split the Lark”
 -The McGurk effect
 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-IN8vWm3m0&t=114s>
 -Luciano Berio, *Sequenza No. 3 for Voice*
 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0TTd2roL6s>
- 1B -John Cage, *4’33”*
 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTEFKFiXSx4&t=79s>
 -Pierre Schaeffer: “Acousmatics”

-Kittler: "Gramophone", (pp.21-38), in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*

Week 2 (April 5) Noises and Soundscapes

- 2A -Luigi Russolo: "Art of Noises"
 -Trevor Pinch and Frank Trocco: "Shaping the Synthesizer"
- 2B -R. Murray Schafer, "The Soundscape"
 -Steve Reich: "Music as a Gradual Process"
 -Recording: Lopez, *La Selva*

 [Recommended: "Systems" in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*]

Week 3 (April 12) Voice as Medium: Bodily Prosthetics

- 3A -Hans Joas: "The Emergence of the New: Mead's Theory and its Contemporary Potential" (pp.89-93), in *Handbook of Social Theory*
- 3B -Mladen Dolar: "Introduction", and "Linguistics of the Voice", in *A Voice And Nothing More*

Sun (April 18) Paper # 1 due

Week 4 (April 26) II. Sound and Philosophical Aesthetics

- 4A Play or watch *Discovery Tour: Ancient Greece* video game (theater tour) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N77vSwNHjA&t=3s>

 Nietzsche: *Birth of Tragedy*
 Sections 1-6; Sections 7-15
- 4B Nietzsche: *Birth of Tragedy*
 Sections 16-25

Week 5 (May 3)

- 5A -W. E. B. Du Bois: *Souls of Black Folk*
 Forethought, Chs I, IV, VI
- 5B -W. E. B. Du Bois: *Souls of Black Folk*
 Chs. X, XIII, XIV, Afterthought

Week 6 (May 10) Image and Sound I

- 6A -Documentary Film: *Gimme Shelter* (Maysles Brothers)
- 6B -James Lastra: “Fidelity Versus Intelligibility” in *Sound Studies Reader* (e-book via library catalog)

Week 7 (May 17) Image and Sound II

- 7A Sunil Manghani: “The Pleasures of (Music) Video” in Gina Arnold et al Eds, *Music/Video Histories, Aesthetics, Media* (ebook via lib catalog).
- 7B Music video continued

Sun (May 23) Paper #2 due

Week 8 (May 24) Electronic Music and Audio Technology

- 8A Documentary: “Synth Britannia” (available on Box)
Selections from various artists: e.g. Stockhausen, Kraftwerk, OMD, Depeche Mode, Human League, New Order etc
- 8B Brian Eno: “The Recording Studio As A Compositional Tool” (audio lecture)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1vuhJC6A28>
- Jonathan Sterne: “The MP3 as Cultural Artifact”

Week 9 (May 31) Recording (the album)

- 9A Radiohead: *OK Computer*
- 9B *Ok Computer* continued

Final Paper #3 due Wk 10 (TBD)

Optional: create a video essay (to show the application of your paper argument to your media object)