

FMST 398K - Special Topics in Film Studies: Sound in Film

Instructor: Randolph Jordan
Room: J.A. De Sève Theatre – LB-125
Time: Thursdays 13:15 – 17:15

Email: randolph@soppybagrecords.net
Office: FB – 334 (Ph: 848-2424 ext. 4666)
Office Hours: By Appointment Only

Required Texts

Chion, Michel. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. Claudia Gorbman, trans. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994 (available at the Concordia Bookstore).

FMST 398K Coursepack containing all required and recommended readings listed below (available at the Concordia Bookstore).

All readings are also on reserve in the Webster Library at the circulation desk.

Course Description

The goal of this course is simple: to provide you with an introduction to the concepts and language necessary to think and write intelligently about the importance of sound in the cinema. Film is a fundamentally audio-visual medium. Yet throughout history attention has centered on film as a visual medium, leaving sound to be considered as little more than support for what is seen on screen. Our attention to sound here will help you achieve a balance between your understanding of sound and image in the cinema. Hopefully this will provide you with some new ways of approaching film as the truly audio-visual medium that it is.

There are three key means by which we will be exploring our topic: assigned readings which detail the key issues that arise when considering the role of sound in film; screenings of key films which provide practical examples of the ways these issues have been explored in cinematic terms; and lectures which will draw the necessary lines between the readings and films. Because attention to film sound is still in its infancy compared to other more developed aspects of film studies, there are not a whole lot of articles available that address specific films in terms of their use of sound. Thus very few of the assigned readings discuss the particular films we will be screening in this class. The bulk of the readings have been chosen because they complement the screenings very well, but their complementary nature might not be obvious at first. As such, attending the lectures is crucial to ensure that you understand the ways in which the films and readings relate to one another. Understanding these relationships will be essential during the writing of your essays.

The course is loosely structured around the progression of ideas found in Michel Chion's *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* which will be complemented by a wide range of readings from other sources. The accompanying screenings are organized thematically rather than chronologically and I have chosen films which best reflect the key points that will be made throughout the term. In addition to the main screenings I will be showing a great many excerpts from other relevant films in order to give you as broad a sense of the subject matter as possible. We will also be listening to relevant works of music and sound art and will engage in several listening exercises designed to help you develop an awareness of sound in its own right.

It is also important to understand that this course is cumulative in nature. Many of the issues and concepts to be raised will necessarily recur over various lectures. It takes time to properly come to terms with many of these ideas, and what you learn from classes early in the term will have a major effect on your understanding of the films we will be screening later in the term. **Regular attendance is crucial.**

Assignments

You are responsible for writing three essays over the course of the term. These essays will be evaluated primarily upon how well they demonstrate your understanding of course materials. Quality of writing will also be taken into consideration; this is a 300 level university course and appropriate standards will be upheld. Good writing skills are essential at this level of education. You may have some very good ideas but if they're not expressed coherently then they're rendered ineffective. The single most common recommendation that I make to most students is this: REVISE. You should spend at least as much time revising your essay as you spent writing the complete first draft. Give yourself enough time to write a full-length draft of your paper and then put it aside for a couple of days. Come back to it with fresh eyes and read it through several times in its entirety. Make notes as you go. Then spend a few days re-working the essay. Many common problems can be fixed in the revision stage, but this requires that you plan your essay writing to account for the extra time necessary for this step. Give yourself this time and you WILL achieve better results. You should also consider visiting the Concordia writing center. There are people there whose job it is to work with you on your individual papers in order to help you get the most out of your writing. Make use of them.

Papers are to be handed in at the **beginning** of class on the days they are due. After class has started they will be considered late and penalties will apply. You will gain nothing by working on your paper at the very last minute and coming to class late in order to hand it in. I am well aware that printers break down and that all kinds of unforeseen circumstances are bound to arise. It is your responsibility to have your paper completed the day before it is due so that if you encounter any of these problems you will be able to deal with them in time to get your paper in on schedule.

First Response Paper – Due February 9th – 1500 words – 25%

In this paper you will respond to a question that will be provided in advance. The question will be geared towards theoretical issues that have been dealt with in the readings up until this point. The purpose of this paper is to get you thinking actively about the important issues and concepts that arise when considering the role of sound in film, and to give you some practice synthesizing concepts from various sources. **You will be responsible for citing at least three of the assigned readings within the body of your essay.** No outside research is necessary.

Second Response Paper – Due March 16th – 1500 words – 25%

In this paper you will respond to another question that will be provided in advance. This time the question will be geared towards films screened in the class. The purpose of this paper is to give you the chance to take some of the ideas you've been exposed to and apply them to concrete examples. There is no minimum requirement for citations here. Just make sure that any articles you choose to discuss in relation to the films are cited properly. No outside research is necessary.

Final Paper – Due Friday April 14th - 3000 words – 50%

In this paper you will conduct an interpretative analysis of a particular film using concepts taken from the readings to support your arguments. Here the topic is entirely up to you, and you may choose any film screened in class. You may also choose a film that was not screened in class, but only if I am familiar with the work. **In all cases you must discuss your paper topic with me in advance.** You will be responsible for citing at least four of the assigned readings. Outside research is not required, though you may feel free to look outside of course materials to support your arguments if you wish. Final papers must be dropped off at the cinema office (FB-319) by 4:30 pm.

Jan. 5 - Week I

Screening:

Touch the Sound – Thomas Riedelsheimer – Germany/UK – 2004 – 99 min

Jan. 12 - Week II

Required Readings: (47 pages)

Audio-Vision – “Chapter One: Projections of Sound on Image.” pp. 3-24 (21 pages).

Schafer, R. Murray. “Chapter 6: The Electric Revolution,” “Chapter 14: Listening” and “Chapter 15: The Acoustic Community.” *The Tuning of the World*. Toronto: McLeland and Stewart, 1977: 88 - 205-225 (20 pages).

McCartney, Andra. “Soundscape Works, Listening, and the Touch of Sound.” *Aural Cultures*. Jim Drobnick, ed. Toronto: YYZ Books, 2004: 179-185. (6 pages).

Recommended Reading:

Bordwell, David + Kristin Thompson. “Fundamental Aesthetics of Sound in the Cinema.” *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*. Elizabeth Weis + John Belton, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985: 181-199 (18 pages).

Screening:

Playtime – Jacques Tati – France - 1967 – 120 min

Jan. 19 - Week III

Required Readings: (55 pages)

Audio-Vision – “Chapter Two: The Three Listening Modes” and “Chapter Three: Lines and Points.” pp. 25-65 (40 pages).

Altman, Rick. “The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound.” *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*. Rick Altman, ed. New York: Routledge, 1992: 15-31 (16 pages).

Recommended Reading:

Gunning, Tom. “Doing for the Eye What the Phonograph Does for the Ear.” *The Sounds of Early Cinema*. Richard Abel and Rick Altman, eds. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001: 16-30 (14 pages).

Screening:

The Testament of Dr. Mabuse – Fritz Lang – Germany - 1930 – 121 min

Jan. 26 - Week IV

Required Readings: (59 pages)

Audio-Vision. "Chapter Four: The Audiovisual Scene." pp. 66-94 (28 pages).

Lastra, James. "Sound Theory." *Sound Technology and the American Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001:123-153 (30 pages).

Recommended Readings:

Jordan, Randolph. "The Dual Substance of Cinema: What Kazantzakis's Christ can teach us about Sound/Image Relationships in Film." *Scandalizing Jesus? Kazantzakis's The Last Temptation of Christ Fifty Years On*. Darren J. N. Middleton, ed. New York: Continuum, 2005: 203-216 (13 pages).

Schafer, R. Murray. "Schizophonia." *The Thinking Ear*. Toronto: Arcana Editions, 1986: 139-143 (4 pages).

Screening:

The Conversation – Francis Ford Coppola – USA - 1974 – 113 min

Feb. 2 - Week V

Required Readings: (61 pages)

Audio-Vision. "Chapter Five: The Real and the Rendered." pp. 95-122 (27 pages).

Ruoff, Jeffrey K. "Conventions of Sound in Documentary." *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*. Rick Altman, ed. New York: Routledge, 1992: 217-234 (17 pages).

LoBruto, Vincent. "Walter Murch." *Sound-On-Film: Interviews with Creators of Film Sound*. Westport: Praeger, 1994: 83-100 (17 pages).

Recommended Reading:

Paine, Frank. "Sound Mixing in Apocalypse Now: An Interview with Walter Murch." *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*. Elizabeth Weis and John Belton, eds. New York: Columbia UP, 1985: 356-360 (4 pages).

Screening:

Picture of Light – Peter Mettler – Canada - 1994 – 86 min

Feb. 9 - Week VI

First response paper is due at the beginning of class.

Readings: None

Screenings:

In Absentia – Brothers Quay/Karlheinz Stockhausen – UK – 2000 – 20 min

Electric Dragon 80,000 V – Sogo Ishii – Japan – 2001 – 55 min

Lucky People Center International – Pauser + Söderberg – Sweden - 1998 – 85 min

Feb. 16 - Week VII

Required Readings: (48 pages)

Thom, Randy. “Designing a Movie for Sound.” *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures 1998-2001*. Larry Sider, Diane Freeman, Jerry Sider, eds. London: Wallflower Press, 2003: 121-137 (16 pages).

Bordwell, David. “The Musical Analogy.” *Yale French Studies*. No. 60.1980: 141-156 (15 pages).

Brakhage, Stan. “Letter to Ronna Page (On Music).” *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*. Anthology Film Archives Series: 3. P. Adams Sitney, ed. New York: New York University Press, 1978: 134-138 (4 pages).

Kivy, Peter. “Why Music?” *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience*. Ithica: Cornell UP, 1990: 1-13 (12 pages).

Bresson, Robert. “Notes on Sound.” *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*. Elizabeth Weis and John Belton, eds. New York: Columbia UP, 1985:149 (1 page).

Screening:

Diary of a Country Priest – Robert Bresson – France – 1950 – 115 min

Feb. 23rd – Reading Week – No Class

March 2 - Week VIII

Required Reading:

Truppin, Andrea. “And Then There Was Sound: The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky.” *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*. Rick Altman, ed. New York: Routledge, 1992: 235-248 (13 pages).

Screening:

Stalker – Andrei Tarkovskiy – Russia – 1979 – 163 min

March 9 - Week IX

Required Readings:

Audio-Vision. Chapters Six through Nine. pp. 123-184 (61 pages).

Screening:

Labyrinth of Dreams – Sogo Ishii – Japan – 1997 – 90 min

March 16th - Week X

Second response paper is due at the beginning of class.

Readings: None

Screenings:

Rubin and Ed – Trent Harris – USA – 1991 – 82 min

Gerry – Gus Van Sant – USA – 2003 – 103 min

March 23 - Week XI

Required Readings: (36 pages)

Jordan, Randolph. “The Echopeople: Reflections on the Concept of Echolocation in Gerry.” *Offscreen*. March 2003 (16 pages).

Camper, Fred. “Sound and Silence in Narrative and Nonnarrative Cinema.” *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*. Elizabeth Weis + John Belton, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985: 369-381 (12 pages).

Eidsvik, Charles. “Background Sounds in Recent Cinema.” *Moving Image Theory: Ecological Considerations*. Joseph D. Anderson + Barbara Fisher Anderson, eds. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005: 70-78 (8 pages).

Screening:

Fire Walk With Me – David Lynch – USA – 1992 – 134 min

March 30 - Week XII

Readings: (48 pages)

Davison, Annette. “‘Up in Flames’: Love, Control and Collaboration in the Soundtrack to *Wild at Heart*.” *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*. Erica Sheen + Annette Davison, eds. London: Wallflower Press, 2005:119-135 (16 pages).

Lynch, David. “Action and Reaction.” *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures 1998-2001*. Larry Sider, Diane Freeman, Jerry Sider, eds. London: Wallflower Press, 2003:49-53 (4 pages).

Toop, David. “Theatre of Sound” and “Ocean of Sound.” *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds*. New York: Serpent’s Tail, 1995: 252-280 (28 pages).

Screening:

Donnie Darko – Original Release Version – Richard Kelly – USA - 2001 – 113 min

April 6 - Week XIII

Readings: None

Screening:

Donnie Darko – Director’s Cut – Richard Kelly – USA – 2004 – 132 min

Final paper is due on Friday April 14th by 4:30 pm at the cinema office (FB-319).