

## *Narratives in Sound* [NMDS 5534 A - Summer.Online]

8-weeks online - graduate production-studio course

The New School for Public Engagement | School of Media Studies [MA Media Studies; MS Media Management]

**Instructor: Joan Schuman**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Summer offers a rich tapestry of sound as windows are flung open and barriers between indoors and the cacophonous soundscape outside are made more porous. In this course, students listen to a range of styles from varying "broadcasts" in order to understand the breadth of sound-only storytelling and the range of new radio genres. Narrative structure and audience reception are compared within and beyond the medium's changing landscape including terrestrial broadcasts, random and regular podcast offerings and hybrid transmissions such as GPS-facilitated soundwalks. Production assignments invite students to select and experiment with one story subject for the entire summer session, building and polishing each stage of the project through to the final production. Students also swap sounds in teams to creatively tell a story with someone else's found sound. Utilizing a 'radical pedestrian' approach to story-gathering, projects will be sound-centric from real recordings gathered in the student's own geography or travels. Diegetic sounds, sonic metaphor and "B-roll" audio collected in the field are encouraged rather than music bridging and its tendency towards listener manipulation. The technique of non-narrated storytelling is the focus of this production course allowing the interviewees' stories to frame the narrative and draw the listener around a rich montage of sounds. Rather than a narrator explaining the story, the collected field sounds and two or more interview subjects share in the narrative structure. Assignments challenge students to gain skills in interviewing; collection of indoor ambient and outdoor field sound; recording gear usage; editing and material organization; and broadcast/platform pitching. The class is designed for those with basic audio production skills and access to tools (on-site at New School labs or via home computer/audio recording gear).

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- compare storytelling in sound in various dissemination styles (broadcast, narrowcast, site-specific, GPS-facilitated, interactive web installation, etc.)
- listen critically by utilizing familiar experiences with related media (literature, film, art)
- investigate form, tone and content relationships by constructing and critiquing student productions
- use the audio medium creatively by exploring narrative approaches and production techniques

### **STUDENT PREREQUISITES**

- completion of one production class equivalent to New School's Media Practices production courses OR equivalent production experience
- access to a computer with internal or external audio hardware interface for input and output of

sound

- access to editing software programs (low-fee consumer or free download: Pro Tools First, Audacity, Sound Studio, Garageband, Reaper, Cubase LE, iMovie; or pro-audio and/or video software suites: Pro Tools, DP4, Adobe Audition, Hindenburg, Premier, Final Cut Pro, Sound Forge, Cool Edit Pro, Logic, etc.)
- software must allow editing up to four tracks of sound with effects capabilities including controls for panning, volume, filters, EQ, etc.
- access to iTunes (or other software) for compressing audio files (to mp3, m4a, mpeg, etc.)
- access to portable recording equipment such as digital audio recorders (flash recorder, record-enabled iPod, apps on smartphones, etc.); video cameras (mini DV, camcorder); portable laptops; or earlier generation audio recorders (cassette, DAT, minidisc) if hardware exists to navigate production process; pro-quality microphone or built-in mic on the flash recorder, mp3, camera, even cell phone (lower-quality recording devices require accommodations to the narrative and sound design)
- pro-quality stereo headphones or external computer speakers
- high-speed Internet connection (at least DSL or cable)

Students living near campus may access all equipment/software for free. Visit the [Information Technology](#) site for details on audio, computer labs and equipment center services (confirm summer hours). All others must have access to the required recording equipment, functioning computer and editing software.

## **COURSE PROJECTS/ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING (1000 points total)**

### **• GENERAL CLASS DISCUSSIONS: Narrative Construction**

**(75 points each = 300 total)**

**Weeks 2, 3, 6, 8**

- critically compare narratives in discussion posts throughout the semester
- investigate form, content and narrative styles
- investigate construction/production methods
- inquire and compare (rather than summarize) producer styles and impact
- investigate audience and broadcasting genre (terrestrial radio; podcasting; site-specific audio walks, etc.)
- time-manage critical analysis, application and discussions

### **• PRODUCTIONS: use same story material throughout each project, building to the final production for the course:**

**(100 points each = 300 total)**

**Weeks 4, 7, 9**

-**First Stage**: launch your story; it's not framed by narration, but by sounds and your initial interview; students collect sound throughout the semester adding to their focused project (field recordings; your initial interview; associated sounds that function as metaphor are invited in);

this is the first chapter or scene you are building and it is a *finished* scene, knowing there will be more to the story (length: 5 minutes or less)

Due Week 4 - Monday

-**Second Stage**: expand and add an interview (maybe it's not an interview, but rather a conversation you have with someone, including your voice): explore how the voices share in telling the story and how they relate to the sounds you layer in; while projects expand in length, the expectation is that the piece is as long as it needs to be (up to the maximum) and that more of the sound tells the story; more layers, more depth of sonic material is used to structure the narrative (length: 8 minutes or less)

Due Week 7 - Monday

-**Final Project**: expand further; productions are expected to be significantly denser in sound (not just longer for the sake of the assignment); you will not have any framing narration, nothing to introduce or telling us why you are interested in this story, though you may be speaking, telling a story, having a conversation with someone—but you are not explaining anything about the interviewees' stories. Sound will play a very key role in this story overall (length: 9 minutes maximum)

-workshop feedback offered via discussion forums

-assessment based on creative use of the audio medium, narrative approach and production quality with particular attention to the ways experimental narrative invites listeners to step into the soundscape and comparable in quality and scope to existing narratives listened to during the semester

Due Week 9 - Monday

-Stages 1& 2 assignments include submitted written tape log/transcripts of interviews beforehand

### • INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

(100 points each = 200 total)

Weeks 3 & 6 - due Friday

-compile word-for-word tape logs of each of your interviews for your evolving production stages (before Stage 1 and before Stage 2)

-qualitatively code for ease of use

-begin to see where stories are strongly told and/or intersecting with other interviewee's stories for your semester-long project

### • MIDTERM ESSAY: PROTEST + CITIES - LISTENING, GATHERING, COMPOSING

(100 points)

Week 5 - due Wednesday

A short written response essay based on the Found Sound field recording experience and discerning how other artists/sound recordists handle their raw material of listening deeply to cities and protests. Includes podcasts, *Where @bouts* ("Righteous Fury" series); *Sound Matters* ("Sound of the Cities" series, "Untitled Noises of New York"); and *La Cosa Preziosa* ("Entomophobia" and "Binario"), as well as reading interviews with musicians/recordists in Mark Smith's *Field Recording: The Practice & Its Possibilities*.

## • FOUND SOUND EXPERIMENTS

(100 points)

Sounds due - Week 4 - Friday

Productions due - Week 6 - Monday

- each student collects 2-3 distinct **real** sounds from their environment (sounds can be ambient only or ambient including diegetic spoken voice captured)
- the sounds are swapped with another student
- each student creates a short piece (3-minutes, maximum), adding just one additional sound and/or voiced story
- pieces are considered for their creative approaches to narrative structure

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Week 1:

Orientation; Introductions; What is Narrative  
Radio Atlas: listening in another language

### Week 2: Narrative Construction: Form + Content

- Janet Cardiff + George Bures Miller / *Forest (for a thousand years)*
- Nichole Canuso / *The Garden*
- Meira Asher / *Refuse: Military.01*
- Christopher DeLaurenti / *Fit the Description*

### Week 3: Narrative Construction: Interviews + Sound Set-up

- Félix Blume / *Los Gritos de Mexico*
- Lu Olkowski / *The Pirate*
- Damali Ayo & Dmae Roberts / *Living Flag*
- Rob Rosenthal / *Recording Not By the Book*
- Annie McEwen / *Oh Brother*

Interview transcripts due Friday

### Week 4: PRODUCTIONS

Student Productions due Monday - Stage 1  
Found Sounds submitted to team partner - by Friday

**Week 5: Midterm essay [NO IN-CLASS DISCUSSIONS]**

**Protests + Cities**

*Field Recording: The Practice & Its Possibilities*, Mark Smith

Where @bouts / *Righteous Fury*

Sound Matters / *Untitled Noises of New York*

La Cosa Preziosa / *Entomophobia and Binario*

Midterm - Protest + Cities - Listening, Gathering, Composing: essay assignment due Wednesday

**Week 6: Narrative Construction: Editing, Mixing, Material Organization**

-Julia Barton / *Cultivating the Editor in Your Brain*

-David Weinberg / *Random Tape*

-Tessie Word / *Convergence*

Found Sound production due Monday

Interview transcripts due Friday

**Week 7: PRODUCTIONS**

Student Productions due Monday - Stage 2

**Week 8: Narrative Construction: Internal Action**

-Dragan Todorovic / *In My Language I am Smart*

-Miyuki Jokiranta / *No Event*

-Justine Paradis / *Points Unknown*

**Week 9: PRODUCTIONS**

Student Productions due Monday: Finals - finished mixes