ASTU 4450: Topics in New Media Art
History and Techniques of Sound Art

Tuesday and Thursdays
5:00pm-7:50pm
Curry Hall Rm 316
(and sometimes at other locations TBD)
Martin Back, Professor
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Course Description
Was so-called sound art born when Luigi Russolo, Futurist author of The Art of Noise, designed and implemented his intonarumori? Or perhaps when John Cage questioned the fundamental notion of music with his infamous 4’ 33”? Or did sound art come into being after Robert Morris created arguably the first sound sculpture, Box With the Sound of It’s Own Making? Or was sound art conjured up in the same year as Morris’ Box—1961—by Yoko Ono and her instruction-piece, Voice Piece for Soprano? Sound Art is a contentious term with a much argued history. This studio art course is less concerned with lineage or birthright than with examining the many ways in which individuals have explored sound as a medium for creative inquiry.

Course Structure
Each week will be divided between a session concerned primarily with theory and a session devoted to practice. The first session of each week will consist of reading discussions, listening, videos, objects, and sounds. The second session of each week will consist of practical engagement with the technology of sound production towards the realization of critically aware projects. Students will be evaluated on the basis of their comprehension of course materials, attendance and preparation, critical engagement with ideas in the course, and the ability to synthesize key issues developed throughout the semester.
Course Objectives
This course will require of the student to:
1. Become familiar with experimental works by composers whose intent was to broaden the practice of musical composition and performance beyond the traditional boundaries of musical notation and instrumentation.
2. Become familiar with the history of artists’ use of sound as a creative medium.
3. Complete 5 works during the course of the semester.
4. Participate in the workshop with visiting artist Dan Gottwald.
5. Keep a sound diary.
6. Complete all assigned readings and participate in thoughtful discussions regarding those readings.

Learning Outcomes
This course will introduce students to the history and practice of Sound Art. Special attention will be given to theoretical concerns as they relate to both music and visual art. Students will also learn, through the execution of creative assignments, various technologies related to sound art in practice. Each week will be roughly divided between a session concerned primarily with theory and listening and a session devoted to practice. We will execute many projects in groups or as a collective.

Required materials: journal, materials to build 2 contact microphones (2 piezo discs, 2 mono ¼” plugs, 5+ feet of single conductor, shielded microphone cable), 1 or more pair of surface transducers, speaker wire, 1 or more pair of small loudspeakers, 1 pair of decent headphones, 8+ GB SD card, external hard drive, CVAD sculpture shop card.

Online resources: www.ubu.com  
http://www.onelonelypixel.org/soundart.html

Grading
Students will be graded upon completed projects, attendance and participation, presentations, and readings. Projects will be evaluated by their originality and conceptual clarity, evidence of technical development, adherence to deadline, and attention paid to detail and execution.
A=100-90 B=89-80 C=79-70 D=69-60 F= <60

Attendance Policy
It is your responsibility to attend class on time. Lateness by more than 10 minutes will result in an absence. You are allowed no more than THREE absences. More than three absences will result in a WF or an F for the class. Any necessary absences known of in advance should be approved by the Professor within the first 3 weeks of class. These absences will, however, count against the 3 absence limit. An excused absence
will only be granted in the case of an illness with a written doctor’s note (presented to me as a physical copy) or a family emergency with provided documentation.

PLAGIARISM
Plagiarism is the unauthorized use or close imitation of someone else’s original work and will not be tolerated. Effort should be made to change images made by others so that they will not be construed as “borrowed” or “stolen.” Work that is plagiarized will not be accepted and may result in a failing course grade and/or expulsion from the University.

AMERICAN DISABILITIES ACT
“The College of Visual Arts and Design is committed to full academic access for all qualified students, including those with disabilities. In keeping with this commitment and in order to facilitate equality of educational access, faculty members in the College will make reasonable accommodations for qualified students with a disability, such as appropriate adjustments to the classroom environment and the teaching, testing, or learning methodologies when doing so does not fundamentally alter the course. If you have a disability, it is your responsibility to obtain verifying information from the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) and to inform me of your need for an accommodation. Requests for accommodation must be given to me no later than the first week of classes for students registered with the ODA as of the beginning of the current semester. If you register with the ODA after the first week of classes, your accommodation requests will be considered after this deadline. Grades assigned before an accommodation is provided will not be changed. Information about how to obtain academic accommodations can be found in UNT Policy 18.1.14, at www.unt.edu/oda, and by visiting the ODA in Room 321 of the University Union. You also may call the ODA at 940.565.4323.

Blackboard
Make sure that you can access Blackboard Learn System and that you are enrolled correctly in your course! Email your instructor immediately if you are not correctly enrolled. Your UNT email address will be the ONLY ONE used for communication with the instructor. Make sure that is working fine and check it often for announcements.

Schedule
**Week 1**
Jan 19 & 21
Origins

**Week 2**
Jan 26 & 28
Everyone’s instrument/Man is a sound chamber
Week 3  
Feb 2 & 4  
Tickle Your Nose Hairs/Man is a sound chamber

Week 4  
Feb 9 & 11  
Hearing that which cannot be heard/Transducers: Contact Mics

Week 5  
Feb 16 & 18  
Unusual Plectrums/Transducers: Loudspeakers, Tactile, Signal Flow

Week 6  
Feb 23 & 25  
Resonant Bodies/Transducers and sound installation

Week 7  
Mar 1 & 3  
Do It Yourself/Instruments

Week 8  
Mar 8 & 10  
Scratch (and sometimes Sniff)/Instruments

Week 9  
Mar 15 & 17  
Spring Break

Week 10  
Mar 22 & 24  
Minimalisms/Drones, Tuning, and Time

Week 11  
Mar 29 & 31  
Forever Music/Drones, Tuning and Time

Week 12  
Apr 5 & 7  
Almost Nothing/Sites

Week 13  
April 12 & 14  
Ambient call and response/Sites

Week 14  
April 19 & 21  
Visiting Artist Dan Gottwald

Week 15  
April 26 & 28  
Synthesis

Week 16  
May 3 & 5  
Final Projects and Wrap Up
Reading Schedule
Reading 1: Sound Art, Art, Music, Douglas Kahn due Jan. 21


Reading 3: Sound Art and the Sonic Unconscious, Christoph Cox, 2009 due Feb. 9

Reading 4: Chapter 10, Ears, from Your Inner Fish, Neil Shubin, 2009 due Feb 23

Reading 5: Musicking- the meanings of performing and listening. A lecture, Christopher Small, 1999 due March 1

Reading 6: The Scratch Orchestra and the Visual Arts, Michael Parsons, 2001 due March 8

Reading 7: Lamonte Young to 1960, Mark Alburger in 21st Century Music, 2003 due March 22

Reading 8: The Politics of Presque Rien, Eric Drott due April 5

Project Due Date Schedule*
*subject to change as needed
Feb. 4 Man is a Sound Chamber/Sound Poetry Project

Feb. 18 Contact Mic Recording Projects

Feb. 25 Miniature Sound Installations using Loudspeaker Plectrums or Surface Transducers

March 3 Group Improv Participation

March 10 Custom Instrument and Graphic Scores

March 31 Drone Piece

April 26 Sites

May 5 Final Piece