Fall 2020
4.s33 | Synchronizations of the Senses

Instructor: Renée Green, erg@mit.edu
Office Hours: by appointment
Teaching Assistant: Emma (Yimeng) Zhu; emmazhu@mit.edu
Time: Tuesday 7-10pm
Units: 3-0-6 G
Prerequisites:
Permission by the instructor is required for undergraduates

Course Description:
Synchronizations of Senses (SOS), a seminar/workshop/studio/study group/conversation, is a complement to 4.356 Cinematic Migrations. This class invites in-depth examination of sense percepts, noting nuances, and articulating specificities. A generative focus is placed on the practices of varied practitioners—film directors, artists, musicians, composers, architects, designers—whose writings relay a process of thinking and feeling integral to their forms of material production.

Using prompts suggesting varying contexts, such as The Film Sense, written by Sergei Eisenstein, and The Cinema Interval, written by Trinh T. Minh-Ha, in addition to other writings by Eisenstein and Minh-Ha and others, the intention of this course is to create a space for experimentation, exploratory discussion and productions via aesthetic inquiry into perceptions of all senses.

Testing various ways aesthetic forms and their shifts—historic and contemporary—have relations to still emerging contemporary subjectivities (felt emotion in a human body), in this workshop/seminar we will study productions created by participants, case studies of varied producers, and generate new work individually and/or collaboratively via diverse media explorations, which include reading, writing, drawing, and publishing, as well as photographic, cinematic, spatial, and audio operations productions.

The course contents will comprise screenings, listening assignments, and guest visits, in addition to readings, discussions, and presentations. An aim is conviviality, rigor, and engagement fueled by the willingness of the participants to share perceptions and projects. The SOS Documentation Project, produced by the previous participants, is an ongoing accretive node.

Course References:
Filmmakers considered include Sergei Eisenstein, Luis Buñuel, Ousmane Sembene, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Lucrecia Martel, Jia Khangke, Andrei Tarkovsky, John Akomfrah, Jean-Luc Godard, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Abderrahmane Sissako, Haile Gerima, and others.

Selected Readings:
This is a list of readings indicating what class participants may be able to choose from in relation to their interests.


The asterisks (****) indicate readings to be read during the initial weeks of the workshop/seminar, as these will allow us to begin discussions of a matrix of terms we’ll be working with—such as *functives, percepts, and concepts*—in order to share a basis for further probing.


‘Anassignment Letters’


‘Conclusion : From Chaos to the Brain’


University of Aberdeen, 2010.

Further References:


Course Schedule:

Week 1
Tuesday Sep 1
Discussion: Introduction.
We will each state our interests and what we hope to do.
Guests:
Readings:
Screenings:

Week 2
Tuesday Sep 8
Discussion: Week Two:
Your brief presentations and discussion.
A discussion of interests and readings, focusing on approaches and questions. Students will be asked to choose from reading materials—and to supplement these, if desired—to focus on an aspect of their interest. The intention is to focus in depth on particular readings by distributing the readings between participants, who will lead discussions and presentations. Ideally everyone will have access to the materials. More than one person may work together on particular themes or interests. Each week someone will direct our attention. Each week someone will bring, or make food, or have a food plan/arrangement. We will discuss what making is imagined. All to be refined and explored in workshop/seminar discussions.

Guests:
Readings:
Screenings:

Week 3
Tuesday Sep 15
Discussion:
Guests:
Readings:
Screenings:

Week 4
Tuesday Sep 22
Discussion:
Guests:
Readings:
Screenings:

Week 5
Tuesday Sep 29
Discussion:
Guests:
Week 6
Tuesday Oct 6
Discussion:
Guests:
Readings:
Screenings:

Week 7
Monday Oct 12 (Columbus Day - holiday)
Tuesday Oct 13 (No Class, Monday schedule of classes)

Week 8
Tuesday Oct 20

Midterm:

Written Midterm Assignment:
8 page paper (grads) 5 page (undergrads). Describe your inquiry, based on one or more questions, in relation to your developing work. Probe these in relation to your interests and sources and in relation to the syllabus readings, viewings, listenings, observations, etc. Please choose a particular aspect to focus on that rouses your curiosity and interest. It isn’t necessary to cover all of the material, but it is important to probe and to articulate a question and to use a form of critical thinking to discern what you’ve read and what you’ve watched, as well as questions that may have arisen in discussion. How have any ideas that relate to your work been stimulated? Please think of this assignment in relation to “Synchronizations of Senses” as a research project that continues beyond the scope of this class. If you agree, all of the papers will be uploaded to the Canvas site to share the information between class participants.

Midterm Presentation:

Your work and questions as you see these related to or stimulated by your interests relevant to “Synchronizations of Senses.” This can also include a presentation of questions with which you’re engaged and interested in discussing in dialogue with class participants. The length of your presentations will be determined by the number of presenters. This will be confirmed in a previous seminar.

Week 9
Tuesday Oct 27
Discussion:
Guests:
Readings:
Screenings:
Week 10
Tuesday Nov 3
Discussion:
Guests:
Readings:
Screenings:

Week 11
Tuesday Nov 10
Discussion:
Guests:
Readings:
Screenings:

Week 12
Tuesday Nov 17
Discussion:
Guests:
Readings:
Screenings:

Week 13
Tuesday Nov 24 (no class - Thanksgiving Holiday)

Week 14
Tuesday Dec 1
Discussion:
Guests:
Readings:
Screenings:

Week 15
Tuesday Dec 8 (last day of class)
Discussion:
Guests:
Readings:
Screenings:

Final Presentation:
Continued development of your work as you see it related to or stimulated by your interests in participating in “Synchronizations of Senses.” You have the option of elaborating on your midterm presentation. What have you discerned since then? The length of your presentations will be determined by the number of presenters. Medium of your choice.
Written Final Assignment:
8 page paper (grads) 5 page (undergrads). Articulation of ideas, processes, observations in forms of your choice.

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Additional readings referencing screenings and class discussions are listed on the Canvas class site.

There are no extensions for midterms or finals.

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Learning Objectives:

To explore perception. To develop an understanding of relations between art, culture and technology via cinema and its genealogy, as well as its changes, in relation to other aesthetic forms, which include input from sources around the world and their varieties of forms for contemplation, generation, and diffusion. Time-based productions, in relation to print media and reading, language and forms of translation, spatial, movement, and sense-related conditions will be explored and produced.

Learning from a close examination of the material and the relations of complex historical contexts with the present, amid other aspects, that inform the emergence of varied creators and the material they’ve produced. Gaining familiarity with the perspectives of practitioners occupying multiple roles. Participants are asked to contribute their own knowledge and to create their own versions in the forms you choose.

Subject Objectives

Comprehension
Completion
Oral Presentation and Documentation
Discourse
Response to Criticism
Auto-Critical Skills

Comprehension is the action or capability of awareness, perception, cognition and understanding something such as vocabulary, your visual language, the textbook and exercises. Completion means following through with work initiated and deciding, in addition to being able to articulate, at what stage the work is in when you have your midterm review and at the final presentation/critique. Understanding the scope of your project(s) and your ability to designate/assign limits in relation to what can be realized is a part of this process. Oral Presentation and Documentation refer to presentations of your work and developing ideas during the course of the semester and particularly during the midterm review and final presentation/critique, at which time you will be evaluated. The degree to which you are able to explicate and create vehicles for others to comprehend what you are engaged with will be evaluated. The evaluation process involves the questions that take place during the review and final presentation/critique. Discourse refers to the material we are reading and the discussion that happens in relation to it. The degree to which you are engaged in the discussions is a
part of having a discourse. **Response to Criticism** refers to how you are able to listen and respond to discussions of your ideas and work, whether from peers, faculty, or external guests. **Auto-Critical Skills** means your ability to evaluate your own process, work, and its relationship to the broader contexts of contemporary art, culture and technology.

**Course Requirements:**

**Grading Evaluation Criteria:**
Students will be evaluated on commitment, engagement and quality of participation in class discussions, exercises, research, final project and attendance. This is considered a studio course that includes screenings, readings, discussion and critiques.

**Class Participation 25%**
Active participation includes the ability to engage in discussions with the class and your thoughts and perceptions regarding what you’ve perceived while, and in reflection after, screenings. Demonstrated engagement includes asking questions and contributing to discussions and critiques.

**Attendance 25%**
Attendance for the full period of class is mandatory. Prompt and regular attendance is required to pass this course. Students are allowed two absences and will be required to make up in some way the classes that are missed. Email in advance of absences and make arrangements with TA about how to make up the missed class. More than two unexcused absences will automatically lower your grade.

**Mid-Term and Final Projects 50%**
The grade for the final project includes research, technical considerations, and form of presentation you can consider these being related to preproduction, production and postproduction, yet all can be in relation to your field of investigation and the specific aspects that are relevant to it.

**Grading Definition:**

**Passing Grades:** Undergraduate and graduate students who **satisfactorily complete** the work of a subject by the end of the term receive one of the following grades:

**A** Exceptionally good performance demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.

**B** Good performance demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.

**C** Adequate performance demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems, and adequate preparation for moving on to more advanced work in the field.

Note that the MIT internal grading system includes plus (+) and minus (-) modifiers for use with the letter grades A, B, and C for all academic subjects (except advanced standing exams). These modifiers appear only on internal grade reports. They do not appear on transcripts and are not used in calculating term or cumulative grade-point averages. The MIT grading system for external purposes does not include modifiers.
D Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems, but also demonstrating deficiencies serious enough to make it inadvisable to proceed further in the field without additional work.

F Failed. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit

Academic Integrity and Honesty:
MIT's expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and adhered to diligently: http://integrity.mit.edu

Student Performance Criteria:
The following has been edited from its original format to relate more specifically to this subject.

Critical Thinking Communication Skills: Ability to read, write, speak and listen effectively.
Art and Design Thinking Skills: Ability to raise clear questions, use abstract ideas to interpret information, consider diverse points of view, reach well and reasoned conclusions, and test alternative outcomes against relevant criteria and standards.
Visual Communication Skills: Ability to use stimulating and relevant media to convey essential concepts and formal elements at different stages of the process.
Investigative Skills: Ability to gather, assess, record, apply, comparatively evaluate and interpret relevant information within coursework and processes.
Fundamental Art and Design Skills: Ability to effectively use basic principles in art and design.
Cultural Diversity: Understanding of the diverse needs, values, behavioral norms, physical abilities, and social and spatial patterns that characterize different cultures and individuals and the implication of this diversity on the societal roles and responsibilities of artists.
Leadership and Practice Collaboration: Ability to work in collaboration with others and in multidisciplinary teams to successfully complete projects.
Human Behavior: Understanding and questioning how to interpret relationships between human behavior (variable) between humans and in relation to myriad built and organic environments.