ONLINE EDUCATION: TEACHING IN A TIME OF CHANGE

• Paper / Proposal Title:
The Sound of Where We Are

• Author(s) Name:
John Roach

• University or Company Affiliation:
Parsons School of Design

• Abstract (300 words):

Sound is intimately tied to our surroundings: wave energy bounces off surfaces, rooms have their own resonance, and our voices respond to the spaces they inhabit. What does it mean then to teach a class about spatial sound phenomena in an online environment? Particularly a class that ends with a site-based sound installation?

This fall I redesigned a course called Sound Matters to explore the pedagogical possibilities of a decentralized, online study of sound and place. Doing so has forced me to grapple with many of the assumptions I’ve accrued over the years about teaching sound: for example, the importance of consistent class-wide access to tools, or the premise that our physical presence at the site was necessary for the best outcome. I imagined that the turn to remote teaching would alter the final project, a site-specific sound intervention, but I did not foresee the value that a decentralized approach would bring to the development of the work.

My students, who come from an array of undergraduate majors at Parsons School of Design, from architecture to fine arts to fashion, had the opportunity to explore sites
geographically close to them, and if desired, connect them to their field of study. This is important, because the course presents sound as a transdisciplinary hub through which various practices can come together. Surprisingly this remote approach enriched the relationship between sound and discipline as well as the connective capacity across disciplines. The depth of student research and exploration was qualitatively enhanced in the online version of the course, and students have developed work that demonstrates a more nuanced engagement with the impacts that sound has on space, place, and ideas. In my talk I will share examples as well as an analysis of how this remote examination of sound and space unfolded.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

John Roach is an interdisciplinary artist and Associate Professor in the School of Design Strategies at Parsons School of Design in New York City. He is the Chair of the Committee on Undergraduate Education, a group instrumental in the 2013 redesign of the undergraduate curriculum. He is actively involved in preparing faculty for remote teaching and offering pedagogical development opportunities with numerous colleagues. He teaches in diverse programs that include the Undergraduate First Year, Integrated Design, Design and Technology and Fine Arts, and his teaching is focused on sound’s role across disciplines. Courses like Sound Matters, Sound and Space, and Sound the Mound, encourage students to move beyond sound as a passive perceptual activity, and engage with its complex relationship to the construction of space, meaning and identity.

John’s installations and performances translate objects and materials into unexpected forms of sensory perception. The work, influenced by the overlapping processes of science and art, has embraced the impact of numerous collaborators: scientists, musicians, writers, coders, and glass blowers. His recent project, “Frozen Words” (2020) is an immersive 12-channel sound installation that mashes up Gargantua and Pantagruel by Francois Rabelais with the verbal bombast of Donald Trump.