
14.1 Sound Connections in Design Education

Abstract

Jessica Barness
Kent State University

As design programs shift gears and offer courses in interaction and motion design, an ingredient begins to appear in student work. It is not visual, but it is always temporal and sometimes social. A foreign yet oddly familiar medium, it transforms the way a designer speaks to an audience, and plays a role in shaping interactive contexts.

Sound is an integral part of everyday life and a critical component in designed digital experiences. Historically, sound informed the design of communication and has been the subject of creative work, beginning with Morse code and typography (“what language looks like”) and moving into music industry print collateral and data visualization. However, sound effects, voiceovers and music — among other things — have been creeping into our areas of expertise since the 1990s. As we continue to design for holistic human experiences, there is opportunity to take ownership of sound in relationship to our research, education and practice.

Digital audio and typography have commonalities; both are embodiments of physical sound that invite expression and meaning making. Audio technologies are readily available for classroom use, yet students are challenged to make decisions on creating, selecting and remixing sound in relation to their visual and conceptual content. Previous design research in this area is limited, and suggests that sound exists at the edges of our knowledge base. We are using sound unlike any other discipline. How do we approach the design process with something that can't be seen, and what might this awareness bring to professional practice? This paper presents connections between design's historical relationship to sound, existing work and future possibilities. Examples of recent student work accompany descriptions of the author's pedagogical approach to sound in interaction and motion design classes. This investigation calls for further inquiry on how sound can be contextualized within design education.