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Review: Sound Never Tasted So Good

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Project

Sound Never Tasted So Good

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Project URL

<https://manifold.as.uky.edu/projects/sound-never-tasted-so-good>

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Project Overview**Steph Ceraso**

Sound Never Tasted So Good: “Teaching” Sensory Rhetorics is a multimedia project that explores how teaching students to experiment with sound can lead to a deeper understanding of how the senses work together. The project focuses on a “multisensory dining event” in which my students worked with a chef to create original digital audio compositions that complimented and enhanced the visual design, smell, texture, and taste of a prepared meal. Drawing from a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary scholarship and media, Sound Never Tasted So Good offers a sensuous approach to digital pedagogy and advances discourse on the role of the senses in educational experiences.

Sound Never Tasted So Good includes an “album” featuring student-produced audio compositions and an “After-Dinner Debrief” that incorporates recordings of the discussion that took place after the meal. With accessibility in mind, I have provided multiple ways to engage with this album. By clicking on a track, readers can listen to the audio itself and/or read a detailed textual description of the soundtrack. The album also includes “Liner Notes” with images and video and a “Bonus Track” that offers sample pairings for listening-tasting that readers can experiment with on their own.

In addition to the album itself, there are four “ambient texts” that enact the ways that my thinking emerged from sensory and material engagements associated with the multisensory dining event. In turn, these ambient texts shape readers’ experiences with and interpretations of the album.

Though I conceived and executed the pedagogical and written parts of this project myself, the digital design of *Sound Never Tasted So Good* was created in collaboration with the editorial team at Intermezzo press, namely editor Jeff Rice and designer Sergio Figueiredo. My students' original audio compositions and work are also featured prominently in this project, and I consider them to be essential collaborators.

The audience of *Sound Never Tasted So Good* includes scholars, teachers, and students of rhetoric and composition, sound studies, and related fields. The audience also includes teachers at any level—K-12 through college—who are interested in enlivening and expanding approaches to digital pedagogy.

After documenting the multisensory dining event throughout the course of the semester, I wrote a traditional longform essay about this pedagogical experiment. I sent the first draft of this manuscript to Intermezzo press along with the associated media and an initial design concept for what the digital version might look like. The editorial team then created a site based on this concept using the University of Minnesota Press's [Manifold](#) platform. The project went through a traditional scholarly review process and round of revision before publication.

Sound Never Tasted So Good was supported with startup funding from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County for the pedagogical event. The event was also co-sponsored by the [Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities \(MITH\)](#) and the [Design Cultures & Creativity \(DCC\)](#) program at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am grateful to the faculty, students, and staff at these institutions who participated in this project.

Project Review

KC Hysmith

We know that our eyes can be bigger than our stomachs, but perhaps our ears can be, too. At least, that's the premise of Steph Ceraso's digital project *Sound Never Tasted So Good: "Teaching" Sensory Rhetorics*. Pulling together multimodal methods of instruction and data collection, Ceraso's project aims to demonstrate the ways the senses work together when it comes to food. The culmination of a "Sound, Composition, and Culture" seminar taught in 2015 at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, *Sound Never Tasted So Good* consists of multiple parts that are presented in the style of a virtual album, including a clever cover that really looks like a record in a sleeve, a course overview in the form of liner notes, and individual audio

tracks with the students' experiments and findings. Listeners can partially recreate the experiment with audio tracks or follow along with helpful transcripts, including a kind of alt-text description of speechless sound clips.

Inspired by the field of food science and the study of the relationship between sound and taste, *Sound Never Tasted So Good* investigates the interplay between composed and embodied sensory experiences. Under the instruction of Ceraso, students crafted a comforting dining environment—considering the sensory aspects of taste, smell, sight, and sound—as part of an elaborate dinner party featuring "Comfort Foods." A volunteer chef helped plan the meal of pulled pork sandwiches, mac and cheese, coleslaw, and warm apple crisp, and dinner guests included students and faculty at the university. In addition to researching and creating multimodal sensory designs, students experienced the pedagogical event in real time to observe their audio-gustatory experiment.

As referenced throughout the project, chefs, diners, and scientists alike have argued that "sound itself can be the source of discomfort in dining experiences" (as Ceraso notes in the "Food, Comfort, Sensation" track). With this in mind, each track of the album corresponds with a different aspect of the dinner, with sensory choices intended to provoke feelings of comfort. For the "Main Course," or Track 3, a student audio composition includes windchimes, gentle kitchen noises, and birdsong, each at various decibels and lengths throughout. Project readers can listen to the final compositions, and photographs of the 2015 dinner party provide evidence of the visual choices made as part of the complete sensory experience.

Despite the multimodal approach of the pedagogical experiment, the final project relied on fairly basic technology provided in most university classrooms, including screen projectors, sound systems, speakers, and computers. While students expressed some dismay at the quality of their provided technology (classroom tech for the sensory experience and basic microphones for the data collection), these tools still proved effective in teaching (and experiencing) sensory rhetorics. To that end, Ceraso provides multiple bonus tracks as listening-tasting pairings for others to recreate and adapt for their own classrooms or future audio-gustatory projects.

An intriguing and pedagogically open-ended aspect of the project is its potential to connect with the established field of food studies, an area of scholarship well-versed in navigating the cultural and composed context around the way we consume food. Summaries of the after-dinner debrief explain how the project failed to consider what "comfort" might mean to different foodways and diverse demographics, in addition to

the "limits of sensory persuasion" on the dining experience, as noted by Ceraso in Track 6. These findings should not be considered failures, but rather opportunities for collaboration and further invitation to use even more modalities in the scholarship of food and the sensory experience.