

COURSE TITLE

Radio: The Theatre of the Mind

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From radio shows to podcasts to the art of the sound effect, audio is an important but often overlooked dramatic medium. Unlike the visual theatre, which needs a stage or a screen or a site-specific location, audio is invisible. And so audio drama can take place in the mind alone. Thus the name for old-time radio: “The Theatre of the Mind.” Through practice, theory, and an intensive essay-writing schedule this course explores the Golden Age of radio drama and the invisible world of sound as a dramatic medium. We will analyze how radio comedy exploits its unseen medium by listening to work by artists like Charlie McCarthy, Jack Benny, and the “Goons.” We will ask how, in the 1930s, a thriller like “The War of the Worlds” used the new medium of radio to create widespread panic and whether such a thing would be possible today. We will also listen to more “highbrow” audio drama, such as Samuel Beckett’s *Words and Music* and Dylan Thomas’ *Under Milkwood*. Through the lenses of culture, ethics, and technology we will focus on topics like class, gender, race, and sexual preference in programs like *Suspense!* and *Amos ’n’ Andy*. Pondering how sound alone can represent such identities, we will wrestle with the ethical question of sonically appropriating identities one does not embody. Using free, downloadable software, this course will also give students a hands-on experience at making their own audio drama. We will script, act, direct, record, and edit this work. No previous experience is necessary, though. Just a willingness to learn and experiment.

ASSIGNMENTS

Essays

As a writing-intensive course, students will be expected to produce three essays over the course of the semester. The first two essays will be completed in two drafts. The final essay will have only one draft. You will receive extensive feedback on each draft so that you can improve not only each essay in particular but your essay writing in general. One of the most important things we will learn in this class is that good writing means *re-writing*. To aid you in this process, I will be giving various short workshops on how to write an academic essay, paying particular attention to such topics as how to write an introduction, construct a debatable thesis, create coherent paragraphs, use textual evidence, and incorporate both primary and secondary sources into your arguments. Most of these workshops will take place toward the beginning of the course. At the beginning of the semester you will also be given a “Guide to Academic Essay Structure” to help guide you in structuring your essays.

Discussion Questions

Because participation is a significant part of the course, it is expected that you will always come to class with questions and ideas you want to discuss. In an effort both to encourage participation and to give you the chance to guide our class discussions more directly, you will be asked to submit **six discussion questions on six different texts** throughout the semester. Please submit these to the discussion forum set up on Blackboard. Try to create questions that will lead to an interesting discussion rather than those that can be answered with a word or two. Develop queries that ask us to look below the surface level of the text rather than read the author’s mind. Consider asking “why...?” or “how...?” or “what do you think...” rather than “who...?” and “what...?” More

examples will be given in class of what constitutes a good discussion question. Questions should be posted on Blackboard by 5pm on the day before class.

Audio Project

Throughout the semester, both during and outside of class-time, students will work on creating their own radio show. You will script, perform, direct, edit, and create the sound design for this project. We will use the downloadable audio editing software, Audacity, which is free, easy to learn, and works across all major operating systems. Students can work alone or in small groups. You will have a great deal of latitude in terms of what you create. For example, you could perform an old show, write your own script, adapt something from another medium (like film or literature), or come up with something entirely different (so long as you get the teacher's approval). The point is not necessarily to create something that is of a professional standard but to learn how audio drama is done and to experiment with various methods and forms.

ASSIGNMENT WEIGHTING

Essay 1	15%
Essay 2	20%
Essay 3	30%
Discussion Questions	10%
Audio Project	25%

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1-INTRODCTION TO COURSE

Discussion Topics on Radio

- The place of radio in today's world**
- Radio and the web**
- Radio's future and new broadcasting technologies**
- The recent interesting radio as a serious scholarly subject**
- Radio technology and national identity**
- The effects of radio on the ways we listen**

Workshops on Essay Writing

- Focus on what your reader needs and wants to know**
- How to construct a debatable thesis**
- A thesis is not a topic**
- How to construct an introduction**

Work on Audio Project

- Discuss possible types of projects**
- Discuss roles of director, actor, writer, etc**

WEEK 2-THE MEDIUM OF RADIO

Listen to Orson Welles, *The War of the Worlds*

Read Douglas, Susan J. *Listening In*, "Introduction," 3-21

Read Crisell, Andrew, *Understanding Radio*, "Characteristics of Radio," 3-16

Discussion Topics on Radio

- Radio as a return to pre-literate society**
- The semiotics of radio**
- Radio as both an oral and a literary medium**

Workshops on Essay Writing

- Creating a Toulmin argument**

-How to construct an interesting and coherent paragraph

Work on Audio Project

-Introduce students to Audacity

WEEK 3- NARRATIVE AND DRAMA, SILENCE AND SOUND

Listen to Orson Welles, *The War of the Worlds*

Read Douglas, Susan J. *Listening In*, "The Zen of Listening," 22-39

Read Crisell, Andrew, *Understanding Radio*, "Radio Signs and Codes," 42-63

Discussion Topics on Radio

-Adaptation and transcodification

-The ethics and aesthetics of radio as a medium

-Film versus radio

Workshops on Essay Writing

-The use of textual evidence

-Citations and bibliography

Work on Audio Project

-Continue to introduce Audacity

WEEK 4- COMEDY AND RACE

Listen to *Amos 'n' Andy*, "Minstrel Show"

Read Wertheim, Arthur Frank. *Radio Comedy*, "Amos 'n' Andy," 35-58

Discussion Topics on Radio

-Origins of the minstrel show

Workshops on Essay Writing

-Use of primary sources

-Use of secondary sources

-Sample introductions and theses

Work on Audio Project

-Discuss how to mix sound effects and music together with dialogue

-Decide whether you want to work solo or in a group

WEEK 5-COMEDY AND RACE (CONT.)

****Draft of Essay 1 due in class**

Listen to *Amos 'n' Andy*, various episodes

Read Shankman, Arnold. "Black Pride and Protest: The *Amos 'n' Andy* Crusade," 236-52.

Discussion Topics on Radio

-Protests against racist radio

Workshops on Essay Writing

-Discuss how the writing process went

Work on Audio Project

-Finalize groups and projects

WEEK 6-COMEDY AND SEXUALITY

Listen to *The Jack Benny Program*, "Your Money or Your Life"

Read Douglas, Susan J. *Listening In*, "Radio Comedy and Linguistic Slapstick," 100-23

Discussion Topics on Radio

-Anxiety and laughter at male homosexuality

Workshops on Essay Writing

-How to revise

Work on Audio Project

-Training on Audacity software

WEEK 7-COMEDY AND SEXUALITY (CONT.)

****Revision of Essay 1 due in class**

Listen to *The Chase and Sanborn Hour*, "Adam and Eve"

Read *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, Murray, Mathew. "'The Tendency to Deprave and Corrupt Morals': Regulation and Irregular Sexuality in Golden Age Radio Comedy," 135-56

Discussion Topics on Radio

-Containing female sexuality through radio

-The effects of World War II on Radio programming with respect to gender

Workshops on Essay Writing

-Checking for coherence between the body of the essay and thesis

Work on Audio Project

-Begin rehearsing without recording

WEEK 8-COMEDY AND THE IMAGINATION.

Listen to *The Goon Show*

Listen to *The Abbott and Costello Show*, "Who's on First?"

Read Crisell, Andrew. *Understanding Radio*, "Comedy and Light Entertainment," 164-85

Discussion Topics on Radio

-Special effects and humor

-Verbal humor

Workshops on Essay Writing

-Discuss second essays

-How to improve introductions, theses, etc.

Work on Audio Project

-Continue rehearsing without recording

WEEK 9-EAST MEETS WEST

Listen to *The Lone Ranger*, "The Origins of the Lone Ranger"

Read Russo, Alexander. "A Dark(ened) Figure on the Airwaves," 257-76

Discussion Topics on Radio

-American identity and the romance of a disappearing west

-Portrayals of Native Americans on the radio versus on film and television

Workshops on Essay Writing

-Brainstorm theses for essay 2

Work on Audio Project

-Begin recording

WEEK 10-EAST MEETS WEST (CONT.)

****Draft of Essay 2 due in class**

Listen to *Have Gun, Will Travel*, "Farewell to Paladin"

Listen to *The Green Hornet*, "Murder and the Dope Racket," August 1941

Discussion Topics on Radio

-Representations of Asians before, during, and after World War II

Workshops on Essay Writing

-Discuss paragraph points

Work on Audio Project

-Continue recording

WEEK 11-RADIO AND MUSIC

Listen to Samuel Beckett, *Words and Music*

Read Arnheim, Rudolf. *Radio*. "The World of Sound," 27-51

Read "In Praise of Blindness: Emancipation from the Body," 133-203

Discussion Topics on Radio

-Influence of radio technology on popular and classical music in the U.S.

-Music, language, and aurality on the radio

-Blindness and silence

-Music as a commodity

Workshops on Essay Writing

-How to revise, part II-testing for coherence

Work on Audio Project

-Continue recording

WEEK 12-RADIO AND SOUND ART

****Revision of Essay 2 due in class**

Listen to Dylan Thomas, *Under Milkwood*

Discussion Topics on Radio

-The sound of space

-Sets and special effects

-Changing technology of broadcasting sets

-Audio montage and special effects

Workshops on Essay Writing

-Avoiding too much background information

-What your reader does and does not need to know

Work on Audio Project

-Begin editing

WEEK 13-THE THRILLER AND THE DISEMBODIED VOICE

Listen to *Suspense!* "Sorry, Wrong Number"

Watch Film version of *Sorry, Wrong Number*

Read McCracken, Allison. "Scary Women and Scarred Men: *Suspense*, Gender Trouble, and Postwar Change, 1942-1950," 183-207

Discussion Topics on Radio

- Women in postwar radio
- The scarred psyche
- Radio as an interior art form

Workshops on Essay Writing

- Brainstorm theses for final essay

Work on Audio Project

- Continue editing

WEEK 14-THE THRILLER AND THE DISEMBODIED VOICE (CONT.)

Listen to *The Shadow*, "The Death House Rescue"

Read Douglas, Susan J. "The Ethereal World," 40-54

Discussion Topics on Radio

- Science and the spirit
- Relationship between séances and the origins of radio
- The scientific and popular notion of ether as the medium for both radio and ghosts
- Relationship between the medium of radio and its content

Workshops on Essay Writing

- Students exchange drafts of introductions and theses for final essays

Work on Audio Project

- Continue editing

WEEK 15-SOUND AND COMMUNICATION.

****Essay 3 due in class**

Listen to: Arch Oboler, *Johnny Got His Gun*

Read Arnheim, Rudolf. *Radio*. "Direction and Distance," 52-94

Read Arnheim, Rudolf. *Radio*. "Spatial Resonance," 95-104

Read Arnheim, Rudolf. *Radio*. "Sequence and Juxtaposition," 105-25

Discussion Topics on Radio

- Sound as directionless on the radio
- Sound as distance without direction on the radio
- The sound of space
- Sets and special effects
- Changing technology of broadcasting
- Audio montage and special effects

Workshops on Essay Writing

- Final remarks on writing an academic essay
- How to (and how not to) write a longer essay

Work on Audio Project

- Continue editing

****Audio project should be uploaded as an mp3 to Blackboard on the day and time that the final exam is scheduled for this class.**