

CULTURAL STUDIES: AUDIO CULTURE STUDIES

English 466 | University of Victoria | Fall 2015 | CRN: 14057 | MTh, 1:00-2:20
Classroom: CLE C110 | Course URL: web.uvic.ca/~englblog/466f2015
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an interdisciplinary approach to culture by way of sound. Attending to the political as well as the aesthetic dimensions of sound, we will survey a history of audio technologies (e.g., turntables, tape, radio, and MP3s) together with the cultures in which they are embedded (e.g., remix, high fidelity, protest, and ethnography). We will address questions such as: Do we own our voices? When and why do we think sound is immediate or immersive? Why is sound often associated with emotion? Under what assumptions are sounds gendered, sexualized, or racialized? Is sound ephemeral? Is it material? Do ideologies shape how we hear the world around us? Why do people hack audio technologies or remix sounds? When is sound "authentic"? How do sonic and visual cultures intersect? How does popular culture privilege visuals? How do we think about audio and images together while also considering their differences?

Throughout the semester, we will listen extensively to historical audio, study sound artists, read publications in sound studies, and examine films and advertisements. You will also practice composing in three audio genres: the radio documentary, the voice-over, and field recording. By the semester's end, you will be expected to produce academic arguments anchored in cultural studies methodologies and also reflect on sound as a way to critically approach culture. I will assume you have no experience working with sound.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING EXPECTATIONS

By the conclusion of this course, you should know how to:

- Communicate the relevance of sound and audio to cultural criticism in the humanities,
- Perform numerous "critical listening" methods and explain the differences between each method,
- Contextualize sound and articulate a cultural history of its reproduction,
- Synthesize audio with other media, including text and visuals, and
- Use audio as a persuasive form of scholarly evidence and argumentation.

Your work will be evaluated based on three audio compositions, a final presentation, and a final exam. Please note: even though this course involves audio composition, you are not expected to have any prior experience with sound studies. You are also not expected to produce high fidelity audio pieces.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The only required text for this course is *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (Cox and Warner, eds.), available at the UVic Bookstore. Additional readings, workshops, and related media will be provided in class or via the course website. Access to a computer as well as a means to record sound and edit audio are required for this course. Please note that access is not synonymous with ownership. See “Policies” below for details.

Despite the subtitle of the required text, this is not a course in musicology or music history. Although we will periodically listen to and discuss music, we will do so from the perspective of media and cultural studies.

ASSIGNMENTS

Audio Pieces (three marks, each 20% of your final grade)

During the semester, you will compose three different pieces using audio as your primary medium. Each piece will follow the conventions of a particular genre (e.g., voice-over, radio documentary, or field recording). Two of the pieces will also be accompanied by “copy,” which will meet the Department of English’s writing requirement for 400-level courses. You will be given specific prompts for all audio assignments. They will include detailed instructions as well as learning expectations for each assignment. All audio pieces will be published on the course audio blog, which is passcode-protected, restricted to English 466 students, and invisible to internet search engines.

No competencies in web-based writing or audio composition are assumed prior to enrolment in this course. Early in the semester, I will instruct you in how to use both WordPress and Audacity for audio culture studies. Although the course audio blog is passcode-protected (i.e., not accessible to anyone beyond the class), your work will be accessible well after the term is over. WordPress is a popular, open-source content management system used in education and industry alike. Audacity is a free, cross-platform sound editor common across numerous professions.

Final Presentation (one mark, 10% of your final grade)

Near the end of the course, you will give a very short, informal presentation on a particular aspect of English 466. It will draw evidence from your audio work, and the intended audience will be me as well as your English 466 peers.

Final Exam (one mark, 30% of your final grade)

At the term’s end, the final exam will be administered during the official exam period. It will cover all texts and audio assigned for the term, all class discussions, and all lectures. It will consist of short-answer and multiple-choice questions. It will not be open-book.

ASSESSMENT

The English Department uses the following scale for grading purposes:

A+	90-100	B-	70-72
A	85-89	C+	65-69
A-	80-84	C	60-64
B+	77-79	D	50-59
B	73-76	F	0-49

I will not use plagiarism detection software when assessing your work, and I will determine final grades in accordance with the University's official grading system: web.uvic.ca/calendar2015-09/GRAD/FARe/Grad.html.

N Grades

If you complete the following assignments, then you will be considered to have completed the course and will be assigned a final grade:

- One audio piece, and
- The final exam.

If you fail to complete these assignments, then you will receive a grade of "N" regardless of the cumulative percentage on other elements of the course. An "N" is a failing grade, and it factors into your GPA as a 0 (the maximum percentage that can accompany an "N" on a transcript is 49).

Circulation of Marks and Feedback

While, throughout the term, I will provide feedback via the course website, I will not, at any time, post grades there, outside my office door, or in any other public forum. Grades will be circulated privately.

Grading Rubric for the Audio Pieces

A+: The content is incredibly well composed, focussed, and coherent. It could be published and played in a public forum. It demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it persuasively considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It contains few (if any) editing errors or slippages. The audio reflects an innovative and in-depth engagement with the topic, and it openly engages numerous interpretations at once, drawing from and augmenting class lectures and discussions. Even if the audio's arguments are implicit, audiences should find them persuasive. The composition strategies are not simply adopted or borrowed from existing work in the field.

A- or A: The content is well composed, focussed, and coherent. It demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it persuasively considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It contains few (if any) editing errors or slippages. The audio reflects an in-depth engagement with the topic, and it openly engages numerous interpretations at once, drawing from and pointing to gaps in class lectures and discussions. Even if the audio's arguments are implicit, audiences should find them

persuasive. The composition strategies are only partially adopted or borrowed from existing work in the field.

B- through B+: The content is well composed and focussed. It demonstrates some awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It contains some editing errors or slippages. The audio reflects an earnest engagement with the topic, and it openly engages numerous interpretations at once. Even if the audio's arguments are implicit, audiences will likely find them persuasive. The composition strategies are only partially adopted or borrowed from existing work in the field.

C or C+: The content lacks cohesion, and the composition could use significant revision. The audio piece demonstrates little awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it does not consider multiple perspectives when appropriate. It contains various editing errors or slippages. The audio does not reflect a meaningful engagement with the topic, and it does not engage numerous interpretations at once. The composition strategies are largely adopted or borrowed from existing work in the field.

D: The audio is not focussed, or simply rehashes previous approaches/techniques, and displays no evidence of student engagement with the topic.

F: The audio is missing or falls extremely short of the requirements articulated in the prompt.

(This grading rubric is borrowed, in part, from Mark Sample's "Pedagogy and the Class Blog.")

Suggestions for Doing Well in This Course

If you take notes by hand during class, then write them with a pen or pencil and then digitize them. This way, you are not staring at a screen while you're in class.

Write while you read and listen. Annotate the primary material, where possible.

Come to class with ideas and questions. Be curious. Seek connections between texts, between projects, and between this course and others, even in other disciplines.

Let me know when you don't follow what I'm saying. I am not aware of what you do not know or do not understand, and I may assume more contextual knowledge than I should. I find this stuff fascinating, but I will not always know what you want to investigate or know more about.

Persuasive work takes time. Before you submit an audio piece, consider circulating drafts. Ask friends or peers to give your work a listen. Come chat with me during office hours.

During class and in writing, be concrete when you comment on anyone's work (including the materials we're discussing). Quote it. Speak to specific elements. And then respond with your own interpretations. When the work is by a peer, be sure to affirm their ideas (e.g., "I like how you...").

Share ideas and discuss course material outside of class. If you have a question, then ask your classmates or me. If you hear something you want to remember, then note it for later reference. If you like the work your peer's done, then tell them so.

("Suggestions for Doing Well in this Course" adapted from a syllabus written by Christopher Douglas, University of Victoria, Department of English.)

POLICIES

Attendance

You are expected to attend all classes in courses in which you are enrolled. A department may require you to withdraw from a course if you are registered in another course that conflicts with it in time. I may refuse you admission to a lecture because of lateness, misconduct, inattention, or failure to meet the responsibilities of the course. If you who neglect your academic work, including assignments, then you may be refused permission to write the final examination. If you are absent because of illness, an accident, or family affliction, then you should report to me, by email, either before or after said illness, accident, or affliction.

Aside from attending for the sake of attending, I create several incentives for you to come to class. Those incentives include: 1) sparking ideas and topics for your audio assignments, 2) mentioning material that will be on the exam, 3) lecturing on topics relevant to the exam, 4) face-to-face discussions about the audio assignments and exam, and 5) hands-on workshops on material related to the audio assignments and exam.

If you miss more than 20% of the scheduled class meetings (without documentation of illness, accident, or family affliction), then you may not be able to qualify for the final exam.

Participation

Since conversations are essential to the quality of this class, I expect that students shall work together (me included) to create an atmosphere of respect. University level discourse does not shy away from sensitive issues, including questions of race, gender, class, sexuality, politics, and religion, and neither will we. There are going to be

differences of opinions, beliefs, and interpretations when we question materials and cultural issues.

You need not agree with the arguments in the course material or with what your peers or I have to say—in fact, it is important to think critically and question the course material. Still, please do so intelligently and with respect. Respect for difference is instrumental to creating a classroom in which a variety of ideas can be exchanged and points of view can be explored.

What is crucial to this course is that you are comfortable expressing yourself and your ideas. If, for whatever reason, you are not, then you should notify me immediately in class or visit me during my office hours. I understand that some people are more comfortable speaking in front of the class than others. That said, participation in office hours also augments learning. If you are not comfortable bringing your concerns directly to me or are not satisfied with my response to your inquiries, then I encourage you to contact the Department of English.

Late and Missed Submissions

Barring written documentation of illness, an accident, or family affliction, all of your assignments must be submitted prior to the class meeting when they are due, meaning I will not mark late submissions. Near the end of the course, your presentation must be given on the day it is scheduled, and you must contact me in advance if you cannot, for documented reasons, attend the presentation or exam. All missed assignments will receive a zero.

Computers in the Classroom

Given the applied nature of this course, I recommend bringing a laptop to class meetings. But a laptop is by no means required, and I recommend taking notes by hand, with a pen or pencil. You will, however, need access to a computer outside the classroom. If you do not own a computer, then please notify me. I will direct you to resources on campus.

E-Mail

With the exception of holidays and weekends, I respond to student emails within twenty-four hours.

Learning Climate

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. Both you and I are expected to adhere to UVic equity and human rights policies. You should alert me immediately if you have any questions about this policy and its application, or if you have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to adhere to UVic academic integrity policies and fair dealing guidelines. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, you agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review.

Writing Improvement

I may require you to seek general writing improvement and/or assignment tutoring at The Learning and Teaching Centre. If so, then you may rewrite your work without penalty within three weeks of receiving notice from me.

Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a special need or health consideration that may require accommodations, then please feel free to approach me and the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability (RCSD) as soon as possible. The RCSD staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Although it is subject to change, below is the course outline as of September 10th. Note: unless stated otherwise (e.g., “circulated to the class”), all readings below are from *Audio Culture*.

Week 1 | Sept. 10 (Th) | Introductions: Do We Own Our Voices?

Thursday Introductions | Syllabus Review | Discussion: “Do We Own Our Voices?” | Laurie Anderson, “Difficult Listening Hour”

Week 2 | Sept. 14 (M) and 17 (Th) | A Brief History of Sound Reproduction

Monday Lecture: Sound Reproduction from the 1850s through the 1930s
Listening: Early phonograph recordings; *Actionable Offenses*
Due: Read “Into Sound,” by Bull and Back (circulated to the class)

Thursday Lecture: Sound Reproduction from the 1940s to the Present
Listening: Lead Belly, Christian Marclay, Grandmaster Flash, Oval
Review: Audiography Prompt (Audio Piece #1)

Week 3 | Sept. 21 (M) and 24 (Th) | Sound as Object and Environment

Monday Lecture: Modes of Listening

Listening: Holly Herndon, DJ /rupture, Brian Eno, *War of the Worlds*, Wilhelm Screams
Due: Read “Modes of Listening” (Cox and Warner), “Ambient Music” (Eno), “The Politics of Hearing” (Eisler and Adorno), “Some Sound Observations” (Oliveros)

Thursday Lecture: Acousmatics, Acoustics, and Soundscapes
Listen: Pauline Oliveros, Hugh Le Caine, Iannis Xenakis
Due: Read “The Music of the Environment” (Schafer),
“Acousmatics” (Schaeffer), “The Liberation of Sound” (Varèse)

Week 4 | Sept. 28 (M) and Oct. 1 (Th) | Recording and Editing Audio

Monday Workshop 1: Using Audacity to Record and Edit Audio
Workshop 2: Using WordPress in this Course
Due: Please Install Audacity on Your Computer

Thursday NO CLASS (Jentery at Arizona State University)

Week 5 | Oct. 5 (M) and 8 (Th) | Sound and Vision

Monday Workshop: Listening to Your Audiographies
Due: Audiography (Audio Piece #1)

Thursday Lecture: The Audiovisual Litany
Listen: King Tubby, Patti Smith, Faust, Various Foley Artists
Due: Read “Hello!” by Jonathan Sterne (circulated to the class)

Week 6 | Oct. 12 (M) and 15 (Th) | Holiday and Guest Lecture

Monday NO CLASS (Holiday)

Thursday Guest Lecture

Week 7 | Oct 19 (M) and 22 (Th) | Fidelity and Glitch

Monday Lecture: Noise and Silence
Listen: Sonic Youth, Kim Cascone, Boredoms, John Cage
Review: Audio Documentary Prompt (Audio Piece #2)
Due: Read “The Beauty of Noise: An Interview with Masami Akita of Merzbow,” “Noise and Politics” (Attali), “The Future of Music: Credo” (Cage), “The Art of Noises” (Russolo)

Thursday Lecture: Sound, Technology, and Gender
Listen: Le Tigre, Pamela Z, Analog Tara

Due: Read Selections from *Pink Noises* by Rodgers (circulated to class)

Week 8 | Oct 26 (M) and 29 (Th) | Materialist Approaches to Media History I

- Monday Lecture: Turntablism
Listen: Kool Herc, DJ Shadow, Portishead, KEXP Documentaries
Workshop: Composing an Audio Documentary
- Thursday Lecture: Magnetic Tape, Cutup, and Collage
Listen: Brion Gysin, Steve Reich, Negativland
Due: Read “Replicant: On Dub” (Toop), “The Invisible Generation” (Burroughs), “Operating System for the Redesign of Sonic Reality” (Eshun), “Bettered by the Borrower: The Ethics of Musical Debt” (Oswald), “Composition as Process” (Cage)

Week 9 | Nov 2 (M) and 5 (Th) | Materialist Approaches to Media History II

- Monday Lecture: The Lomaxes and the Collection of Culture
Listen: Selection of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings
Reading: *Sounding Out!* Series on Alan Lomax (starting with Mark Davidson’s “The Problem of Alan Lomax...”) (circulated to the class)
- Thursday Lecture: Format Studies, the MP3, and Auto-Tune
Review: Voice-Over Prompt (Audio Piece #3)
Due: Audio Documentary (Audio Piece #2)

Week 10 | Nov. 9 (M) and 12 (Th) | Sound, Narrative, and Film

- Monday NO CLASS (Reading Break)
- Thursday Lecture: The Three Listening Modes
Workshop: Listen to Your Audio Documentaries
Listen: Various Examples of Détournement in Film
Due: Read “The Three Listening Modes,” by Chion (circulated to the class)

Week 11 | Nov. 16 (M) and 19 (Th) | Voice-Over

- Monday Lecture: Masking Voice-Over (Documentary to Drama)
Listen: Various Examples of Voice-Over in Film
Due: Read Selections from *Invisible Storytellers*, by Kozloff (circulated to the class)

Thursday Lecture: The Grain of the Voice
Listen: Björk, Missy Elliott, Stevie Nicks, Louis Armstrong, Billy
Holiday, Scott Walker
Due: Read “The Grain of the Voice,” by Barthes (circulated to the
class)

Week 12 | Nov. 23 (M) and 26 (Th) | Review

Monday Lecture: Why Audio Culture Studies? A Review of English 466

Thursday Prepping for the Final Exam | Course Evaluations

Week 13 | Nov. 30 (M) and Dec. 3 (Th) | Presentations

Monday Presentations

Thursday Presentations
Due: Voice-Over (Audio Piece #3)