

LITR 0210H: Digital/Cross-Disciplinary II

Audio • Language • Art

Damon Pham	Class:	Tues 16:00–18:20 Metcalf 103
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Course Description

This Digital/Cross Disc. II Literary Arts workshop explores the art of language inside digital audio. Our class will engage contemporary practices and aesthetics in sound-poem as well as song, spoken word, voiceover, podcast, etc. We will hone technical skills in voice recording, audio production, and digital creativity through a mix of listenings, lectures, hands-on activities, Exercises, an Exam, a written Appreciation and two Reflections, and a Project. We will examine the literary merits and discontents of digital audio, including a comparison of language in sound versus language on the page. Participants will leave the course with a sharpened attentiveness and curiosity toward audio phenomena, as well as a strengthened confidence in their abilities to articulate themselves inside of literary and aural environments.

This course has no prerequisites. Students must have access to: (1) a computer which can run these free software: [Audacity](#), [Pro Tools Intro](#), and the [MFreeFXBundle AAX plugins](#); (2) headphones or earbuds; (3) a microphone for recording one's voice to digital audio. Beyond that, all reading, listening, and production materials will be provided or available online at zero cost. Collaborations, importing work from other contexts, and the true pursuit of one's own aesthetic interests and passions are all wholeheartedly encouraged.

Learning Objectives

The instructor hopes to equip students with the abilities and confidence to:

Write audio language artworks, mindful toward the specificities of the audio medium.

Write spoken language artworks, mindful toward features like prosody and rhyme.

Compose literary works in general, better than before.

Record audio, including one's own voice, well, with the equipment at-hand.

Organize digital audio resources effectively for creative success.

Understand a little bit about sound's physical properties and its digital representation.

Understand the principles of compression, EQ, reverb, delay, distortion, and stereo.

Employ audio effects both correctively and creatively.

Approach creation and revision with openness, attentiveness, and flexibility.

Have ideas about where to look when technology isn't cooperating.

Listen closely to the qualities of both the sound and the language in audio artworks.

Be helpful toward other creatives in workshop-like contexts.

Articulate and care for their own aesthetics, tastes, opinions, values, and subjectivities.

Think about audio production and listening as societal phenomena.

Be brave and intentional as they continue their creative practices post-semester.

Grading

Exercises	30%	: lowest score will be dropped.
Exam	10%	: take-home.
Appreciation & Reflections	10%	(thoughtful, provocative, detailed)
Repository	10%	(organized, abundant)
Workshop	10%	(helpful, specific)
Project	30%	(ambitious, intentional, yours)


This course is S/NC. A final grade of 70% or higher earns an S.

Schedule At a Glance (*tentative)

[Day]


[/ Theme]

[/ Technical Focus]


Note:  indicates that students are asked to bring a laptop and headphones/earbuds to class.

Jan 27	/ Audio: So What?	/ File Creation and Care	
activity:	Entry survey & syllabus & hello's		
lecture:	The specialness of digital audio as an artistic medium		
lecture:	Fundamentals of Acoustics		
break			
activity:	Listen to and discuss tracks from Laurel Halo, keiyaA, and Alex G		
lecture:	Audacity crash course		
lecture:	File management and directory organization; Repository		


Feb 3	/ The Overheard	/ Level Control	
→ Turn in self-intro			
activity:	Revise and articulate together the syllabus, given student intake data		
lecture:	Volume and Playback: gain, clipping, feedback, safety		
lecture:	Compression and Limiting: ratio, attack, release, transparency		
activity:	Debug any issues setting up Audacity, Pro Tools Intro, and Melda plugins		
activity:	Demonstration of recording, monitoring, and exporting in Pro Tools		
discussion:	Compare HW tracks from Smerz, Jazmine Sullivan, and Yves Tumor		

Feb 10	/ The Operatic	/ Spectral Control	
lecture:	EQ: measurement, diagnosis, balance		
activity:	Pro Tools demo: importing audio; channel strip		
activity:	EQ hands-on exploration; tech help		
lecture:	EQ and the human voice; plosives and sibilance; dynamic EQ		
discussion:	Analyze HW tracks + album from Lucy Liyou and Marie Davidson		
discussion:	Describe the experience of an opera-like album; (non-)diegetic sound		

Feb 24	/ Resounding	/ Spatial Control	
	→ Turn in Exercise 1: Recording, compression, and EQ for several audio contexts		
discussion:	Spatialization in HW track by Lost Girls		
lecture:	Mono vs. stereo; Panning		
lecture:	Reverb: reflections, convolutions, psychoacoustics; recording “dry” signals		
lecture:	Relationship between sound frequencies and proximity		
lecture:	Effects: dry/wet; insert vs. send		
activity:	Pro Tools demo: panning; reverb		
discussion:	HW tracks from Youth Radio and Lost Girls		

Mar 3	/ Re-sounding	/ Repetition	
lecture:	Delay: length and feedback; stereo; relationship to reverb; vs. doubling		
activity:	Delay hands-on exploration; tech help		
lecture:	More on Acoustics: sound as waves; interference; speed and sound		
discussion:	HW tracks from Tracie Morris		

Mar 10	/ Speech as Breath	/ Performance and Recording	
	→ Turn in Appreciation Proposal and Exercise 2: Using delay, panning, and reverb FX		
activity:	Share Appreciations in small groups		
lecture:	Breath vs. line break; diaphragmatic breathing and breath control		
lecture:	Recording: body, mind, tech, intent		
activity:	Free time and individual check-ins		

Mar 17	/ Intention	/ Distortion	
lecture:	Artistic intention		
lecture:	Distortion and saturation: causes and effects		
activity:	Distortion: hands-on exploration; tech help		
discussion:	HW tracks from aya, Lorraine James, and Twilight Prince		

Mar 31 / Consider the Listener / Arrangement

→ Turn in Appreciation, Exam, and Workshop materials

lecture: Song and sound-poem structure

lecture: Automation in Pro Tools; ducking, sidechain compression

discussion: Audio streaming on-the-go

Apr 7 / ~ / Workshop

activity: Workshop everyone's Project-in-progress

Apr 14 / The Concept Album / ~

activity: finish Workshop

discussion: Solange's *A Seat at the Table*

Apr 21 / Text vs. Voice / Revision

→ Turn in the two Reflections and Exercise 3: Etude

lecture: Language on the page vs. language in voice

activity: Word stress; the meaning of "I never said she stole my money."

lecture: Revision: linear strategies

lecture: Revision: randomness, refreshment, aim

discussion: HW art from Joy Harjo, Christine Sun Kim, and Gil Scott-Heron

Apr 28 / Ambience / Attentiveness

→ Browse everyone's Appreciations and Reflections

discussion: Reflect on the Reflections

discussion: Ambience, silence, pace

discussion: HW albums from Ana Roxanne and Huerco S.

discussion: Projects check-in

May 5 / Audio as Data / Repurposing

→ Turn in Project, Repository documentation, & Exercise 4: Voiceover or “Musicunder”

→ (Optional) turn in Exam revision

lecture: Resampling and granular synthesis

lecture: Interoperability and transmediation of audio data

discussion: HW track from Arca

activity: End-of-semester celebration

Time Commitment

Class time	2.5 hours / class * 14 classes	= 35 hours
Pre-learning & review	5 hours / week * 13 weeks	= 65 hours
Assignments	4 hours / week * 13 weeks	= 52 hours
Project		= 48 hours
(Total)		= (200 hours)

Assessment

The Literary Arts Department shares the following statement on grading:

Workshops in Literary Arts are taught using an S/NC grade requirement. These are arts courses and thus we consider qualitative assessment to be the cornerstone for judging each student's participation. These classes are designed to be as demanding as any other Brown course; and to earn a passing grade, students must: regularly attend class, actively participate in class discussions, engage with and complete written assignments, and provide thoughtful feedback to colleagues. Just showing up and just turning in “something” will not suffice. The instructor will assess the quality of effort shown by each participant. If a workshop participant appears to be exhibiting substandard effort in any area, the instructor will reach out to the workshop member to outline the concerns (and to gain insight from the participant) and will then provide clear guidelines as to what adjustments are expected. Such feedback will be provided in a timely manner, so that a student may undertake the steps needed in order to successfully complete the course.

Attendance, Assignment Submission, and Flexibility

Students should email the instructor ahead of time to request an excused absence. Students are permitted two unexcused absences; a third will result in a grade of NC. Students who must be absent from the Workshop (April 7) due to [religious observance](#) may complete an alternative assignment.

Students will submit assignments via Canvas. Late submissions will be graded at a $\times 0.8$ multiplier. Students should email the course instructor should they find themselves requiring an extension, make-up assignment, etc.

The syllabus may be adapted over the course of the semester.

Learning and Getting Help Outside of Class

This class covers a lot of ground, in a wide range of territories: the digital world, the phenomenon of sound, spoken language, written language, etc. There will certainly be moments of difficulty and challenge, and these will differ from student to student.

The instructor encourages students to reach out for help by email and during office hours. Email is better for timely and simple matters, whereas office hours is a good space for in-depth problem solving.

Students are also encouraged to develop the skill of independently exploring resources available online, through the BAI, in the libraries at Brown, and within their communities, especially for information on the technical topics covered in the first half of the semester.

Finally, students should remember that this is an intro-level Literary Arts class: technical mastery is not expected. What is expected is an engagement with language that includes experimentation and healthy effort within the demands of working in digital audio.

Accessibility

The instructor is dedicated to making access to learning in this class equitable for all participating students. The university shares the following statement:

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you may require accommodations or modification of any of course procedures. You may speak with me after class, during office hours, or by appointment. If you need accommodations around online learning or in classroom accommodations, please be sure to reach out to Student Accessibility Services (SAS) for their assistance (sas@brown.edu, 401-863-9588). Undergraduates in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact an academic dean in the College by emailing college@brown.edu. Graduate students may contact one of the deans in the Graduate School by emailing graduate_school@brown.edu.

Please refer to the [SAS](#) and the [Dean of the College office](#) for more information.

This course will be taught entirely in English. For information about English language support at Brown, contact ellwriting@brown.edu. Other languages are absolutely welcome in the Exercises and Project: students should discuss with the instructor how best to support and evaluate any non-English language assignment prior to submitting.

There will be class time dedicated to hands-on, trial-and-error learning about audio software tools and techniques. Participation in these activities will require students to bring a laptop with the appropriate software installed, as well as a pair of headphones or earbuds. Students will be notified by the syllabus, and reminded a week prior via Canvas, when they should bring a laptop and listening device to class. Students who do not bring these materials may certainly share with another student as needed.

Headphones, earbuds, and microphones can cost hundreds of dollars. Although students must have playback and recording devices, students are not expected to purchase nicer models: the quality of the equipment will have no bearing on assignment grading. Instead, evaluation will be based on how well students use the tools available to them. A smartphone microphone or a laptop's built-in microphone will both suffice.

The Academic Emergency Fund in E-GAP, in UFunds, may provide options for financing course materials costs. If your financial aid includes the Book/Course Material Support

Pilot Program (BCMS), you can also contact bcms@brown.edu. Brown University has an article about [financial support for buying a computer](#).

Students should feel comfortable reaching out to the instructor if they are facing any barriers (financial, technological, or otherwise) which prevent full engagement in this course, to collaborate on a solution.

Academic Integrity

Please refer to the [Brown Academic Code](#), especially the sections titled “Use of Sources,” “Copyright Infringement,” “Creative Work,” and “Examinations, Quizzes, and Tests.” Academic dishonesty, *including plagiarism and passing off AI as one’s own literary or technical craft*, may result in penalties, including a grade of NC. Please raise questions or concerns about remixing, appropriation, citation, AI, etc. with the instructor prior to submitting an assignment.