
podcasting & pedagogy

“If I were ever to grow up, ever, then I had to hear my accent in the accent of others, and to recognize that anguish was not a province which I had discovered only yesterday, alone.”

—James Baldwin (“Every Goodbye Ain’t Gone,” 776)

“The number one thing about learning is to do: you have to do, you have to make. **You have to do the thing.**”

—Jessica Abel, *Tape* podcast, episode 30 (March 1, 2016)

Audio & Skills-Based Analysis

1. “writing out of tape”: Just like in effective academic writing, in audio, we find key quotations from relevant conversations and then spark them into life in the context of our own analyses. In audio essays, **writing out of tape moves the story forward** through the interplay between narration, excerpts from interviews and, of course, all kinds of other sounds. (This is a lovely metaphor for what we do *in class*, as well: we pay attention to unexpected, interesting moment, and we respond to them or echo them or resist them).

listen: “Writing Out of Tape” episode, *HowSound* podcast; “How not to write for radio” episode, *HowSound* podcast

2. “structure”: the craft of audio-writing is engagingly complex: “taking a bunch of unconnected anecdotes—or ideas—or bits of tape—and forming them into an arc is a very complex and difficult job. Even if you’ve got a focus sentence all worked out, **how do you get from here to there** (Jessica Abel, 112)? The answer is *structure*: finding structure for the tape, discerning the right order that’ll link recordings together with ideas. (This is at the heart of critical thinking skills, as well: drawing out the structure of rigorous, legitimate, compelling and productive lines of thought).

listen: “My Kingdom for Some Structure” episode, *HowSound* podcast

3. “imagine the story”: Do something risky—imagine the story, before you’ve even begun to research it. Dream what it can be, in advance; ask questions like, “What might work as the beginning, middle and end? How can I be sure to capture conflict, tension and other dramatic elements?” And in this way, move towards your story. “Just be sure to keep your ears open” (Rob Rosenthal).

read: Rob Rosenthal, “Imagining the Story,” *Transom.org* 10.25.11

4. “design, edits & uncomfortable exchange”: a good audio essay provides **a reason for the story to exist**, a reason that others find compelling. It opens up ideas that enables others, *from their own first-person perspective*, to understand something in new ways. And this reason only emerges *through edits* by others. Students become teachers, and authority in

the classroom is decentred, when edits become a shared, significant enterprise. “Edits are where you **find solutions to problems you may not have even known you had**” (Jessica Abel, 185).

Jonathan Mitchell: “Every sound you bring into your story is working together to create not just a story experience, but a musical experience, and the ‘music’ you’re making can either serve or undermine the meaning of your story....Whenever I have a hard time deciding what music to use or where to put it, usually that means I don’t really understand why I’m putting music there in the first place. **But a good reason tells me so much:** where it should be placed, what style it should be, what mood it needs to convey.”

Stephanie Foo: “Just 4.78% of newsroom employees are black. 13.34% are minorities.... We feel an obligation to speak up and represent our people if we hear something that could be construed as offensive. So we say something, but instead of taking the comment **for what it is—an edit**—some might see the comment as a call-out... it’s like, okay, fine, I back off—but now I’m not going to say something next time.”

listen: “Tinkering with Sound Design” episode, *HowSound* podcast; “Producing Personal Pieces: Stephanie Foo” episode, *HowSound* podcast; “Interview with Stephanie Foo” episode, *Tape* podcast

read: Stephanie Foo, “What to do if your workplace is too white,” *Transom.org*; Jonathan Mitchell, “Using Music,” *Transom.org* (Exercise for in class: listen together to Mitchell’s “Example 3” while looking at its visual representation)

Audio as Curriculum

“Radio is a peculiarly didactic medium.”

—Ira Glass, cited in *Out on the Wire*

1. Race & the problem of white fragility

Assigned listening: “Pastor Michael McBride says Stop Reaching for Whiteness” episode, *Politically Re-Active* podcast Assigned reading: James Baldwin, “Every Goodbye Ain’t Gone”; Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility”

(Exercise in class: listen to a selection from the episode, starting at 6.48). Notice the framing, editing & juxtaposition of “tape”. Pastor Mike: “it’s always difficult to talk about race.... People want to believe a beautiful lie, rather than live with the ugly truth. Race is robbing every single individual of this country of their full humanity.” Hosts W. Kamau Bell & Hari Kondabolu: “Let’s talk about white supremacy....”

James Baldwin: “In reacting against what the world calls you, you endlessly validate its judgement.... No one, no matter how it may seem, simply *endures* his circumstances. If we are what our circumstances make us, we are, also, what we make of our circumstances. This is, perhaps, the key to history since we are history, and since the tension of which I am speaking is so silent and so private, **with effects so unforeseeable, and so public**” (775-76).

Additional audio suggestions: "Thoughts, Guts & Feelings" episode, *The Get* podcast; "Episode 1: Magic & Tonic" episode, *Sampler* podcast; "Eggshells" episode, *Colour Code* podcast

2. Trans Literature & the problem of the didactic

Assigned listening: "A mom, a transgender daughter & a podcast" episode, *HowSound* podcast; "Casey Plett" episode, *Woodland Secrets* podcast Assigned reading: Katherine Cross, "The literary renaissance of trans women writers" *Bitch Magazine* (Nov 21, 2014); Casey Plett, *A Safe Girl to Love: Short Stories* (Topside Press, 2014); Casey Plett, "Balls Out: A Column on Being Transgendered, column 19" *McSweeney's* (Sept 23, 2011)

"A distinguishing feature of this new wave of trans women's lit: **it is not meant to be didactic for the cisgender reader**. At least, not in the traditional sense that is implied by imperious questions from speakers who wish to be 'educated,' often at the expense of one's dignity.... For all the differences we have with cisgender people, **we share the bonds of humanity that ought to make such stories intelligible**, and thankfully many cis people have walked away with a better understanding of who we are from this bounty of poetry and prose" (Katherine Cross).

"I think all good story telling and all good writing, **if you tell the truth about your experience, it becomes universal**.... The tape kind of talks to each other in ways that I didn't expect.... All of a sudden, we're talking to each other in different tracks—some of it is intentional and some of it just kinda happened" (Marlo, creator of "How to be a Girl" podcast in interview with Rob Rosenthal, "A mom, a transgender daughter & a podcast" episode, *HowSound*).

Additional audio suggestions: "Lovemaps" episode, *The Heart* podcast; "Interview with Kaitlin Prest" episode, *Tape* podcast

References

Abel, Jessica, 2015. *Out on the Wire: The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio*. Broadway Books.
Baldwin, James. "Every Goodbye Ain't Gone," *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, Ed. Toni Morrison. New York: Literary Classics, 773-779.

This is part of a creative commons project, license:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>