

HUMS 449 / MUSI 476

Franke Seminar - The Secret Life of Radio: Fringe Practices of a Mass Medium

Prof. Brian Kane

Monday 1:30 – 3:20, WHC 208

Office Hours: by appointment

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Course Description/Goals:

This course examines selected case studies of marginal and fringe practices of radio broadcasting across its long history. The aim of the course is to defamiliarize the norms of radio broadcasting and reimagine it as a form of creative, political, and social practice.

In contrast to scholarship on radio, which tends to focus on the networks, their programming, and institutional power, this course studies the use of the radio at the margins of the mainstream. We will attempt to balance familiarity with broad histories of radio against intensive study of specific fringe practices. Selected cases will include: early amateur radio, local radio and the problem of the radio archive, the use of radio as a medium for activism and pacifism, the struggle for civil rights and the use of the “border blaster,” contemporary pirate radio and community identity, and radio as sound art.

Students will be expected to compose two short papers (one before the midterm and one after) that investigate course topics in further depth. A final research paper, on a topic of your choosing (in consultation with the professor) will also be expected.

Note about the Franke Seminars and Lectures:

As part of the ongoing series of Franke Seminars and Lectures, “The Secret Life of Radio” invites experts, scholars, and practitioners to visit our seminar, hold a public lecture, and join enrolled students for a meal and conversation. If you are enrolled in the course you are expected to participate in these special events. (The list of visitors, with dates of their visits, is included in the course syllabus.) Public lectures are at 5 pm, and meals follow the public lectures. All events will be held in the Whitney Humanities Center.

The Franke Seminars and Lectures bring important topics in the humanities to a wide and general audience, and tie interdisciplinary undergraduate education to the work of distinguished visiting scholars. Made possible through the generosity of Richard and Barbara Franke, this series of lectures is organized in conjunction with Yale College courses (the Franke Seminars) and develops an annual theme of broad interest to the community.

Course Texts:

- Susan Douglas, *Listening In*. This is available for purchase at the Yale Bookstore.
- Other readings and materials will be available on Canvas.

University policy on academic integrity:

Academic integrity is a core institutional value at Yale. It means, among other things, truth in presentation, diligence and precision in citing works and ideas we have used, and acknowledging our collaborations with others. In view of our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of academic integrity, the following forms of behavior are specifically prohibited: cheating on examinations, problem sets and all other forms of assessment; falsification and/or fabrication of data; plagiarism, that is, the failure in a dissertation, essay or other written exercise to acknowledge ideas, research, or language taken from others; and multiple submission of the same work without obtaining explicit written permission from both instructors before the material is submitted. Students found guilty of violations of academic integrity are subject to one or more of the following penalties: written reprimand, probation, suspension (noted on a student's transcript) or dismissal (noted on a student's transcript).

Grading Breakdown:

Research Paper 1 (3-5 pages)	20%
Research Paper 2 (3-5 pages)	20%
Final Research Paper (~15 pages)	30%
Engagement (including participation in seminars, lectures, and events with our guests)	30%

Grading Policy:

Students are expected to complete all assignments on time. Late work will be subject to lowered grades. Extensions will be granted only in very extenuating circumstances. Because this course is a seminar, you will be expected to attend class having completed the reading, thought about the reading, and ready to talk. Everyone is expected to speak, participate and engage with the course materials, your colleagues, our guests, and your professor.

A final note:

Any and all aspects of this syllabus are subject to change at the professor's whim.

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The Secret Life of Radio – Fringe Practices of a Mass Medium Course Outline

8/30 - Week 1. Radio - Mass and Fringe

- Reading for first seminar: start reading *Listening In*, if you already have a copy.

Part 1. Fringe Practices in the History of Radio

9/9 - Week 2. A Brief History of Radio Culture (to WWII)

- Reading: Susan Douglas, *Listening In* (Introduction, Chapters 1-8)

9/16 - Week 3. Amateur Radio before the Networks

- Readings: Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting* (Chapters 6 and 9)
- Elena Razlagova, from *The Listener's Voice* (Chapter 2)

9/23- Week 4. **Susan Douglas – Seminar and Lecture**

- As preparation students will work with historical radio journals to research communities formed around wireless telegraphy in the 1910s and early 1920s.

9/30 - Week 5. The Radio Archive. [This session may meet at Historical Sound Recordings Archives in the Gilmore Music Library (TBD)]

- Selection of readings on electrical transcriptions (from Topping and Lichty, *American Broadcasting*, Michael Biel's dissertation, and elsewhere)
- Douglas, *Listening In* (Chapters 9-12, Conclusion)

10/7 - Week 6. **Josh Shepperd Visit – Seminar and Lecture**

- To prepare, students will read up on Josh Shepard's project (with the Library of Congress) on the preservation of local radio materials.

Friday, 10/11 – Paper 1 Due

Part 2. Fringe Practices in Contemporary Radio

10/14 – Week 7. Activists and Pacifists

- Barbara Savage, from *Broadcasting Freedom*
- Matthew Lasar, from *Pacifica Radio*

10/21 - Week 8. Black Power Border Blaster

- Timothy Tyson, from *Radio Free Dixie*
- Source materials and documentaries on Robert F. Williams and Mabel Williams.

10/28 - Week 9. **David Goren – Seminar and Lecture**

- To prepare we will read various articles and listen to broadcasts by journalist David Goren about his project to document contemporary pirate radio in New York City, including close study his online sound files and sound maps.

11/4 - Week 10. Radio Art

- Source materials and readings in the history of radio art.

11/11 - Week 11. **Galen Joseph-Hunter and Tom Roe - Seminar and Lecture**

- To prepare, we will read up on the history and current projects of Wave Farm, an experimental community and arts based radio station in Hudson, NY. Students will spend some time listening to Wave Farm's internet feed as well as historically significant pieces of radio art.

Friday, 11/15 – Paper 2 Due

Part 3. Final Projects

11/18 - Week 12. Presentations and Discussions on Final Projects.

12/2 – Week 13. Final Meeting.