

MUSC 1240G Topics in New Media Theory and Production: Post-vernacular Composition/'Pop Music' gone Feral

MEME @ Brown University Music Department | Spring 2015
Location: Steinert 205

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Description

This seminar explores the fertile creative territory found around the more adventurous edges of 'popular' musics. Drawing from both experimental and popular backgrounds, the focus is on non-notated contemporary composition, but participants are not restricted to traditional conceptualizations of the recording studio or the production of 'fixed' works. The idea of post-vernacular is utilized to challenge the view that vernacular or 'popular' musics are only oriented towards commercialism and mass popularity i.e. this seminar seeks to extend and build-upon the inherently experimental dimensions of much vernacular musical practice. Developing a comprehensive theoretical and practical knowledge of studio craft, specifically targeted towards creative recording and production techniques, is one objective. However, the main goal is to arrive at an idiosyncratic definition of post-vernacular composition, through practical exploration. Participants will respond to a number of increasingly open-ended assignments, and will complete a final portfolio. Permission of instructor is required. **Th 4:00-6:20pm**

Assessment

- 30% assignments 1 and 2 each worth 5%; assignments 3 and 4 each worth 10%;
- 20% in-class participation and contribution to <http://hubbub.pm> (an open-ended online forum and internationally accessible archive for creative practice);
- 50% final portfolio of creative work. The specifics of this are negotiated immediately after spring break, but the expectation is that each participant will produce a four track EP of total length 12-16 minutes.

Schedule (tentative)

Jan 22 rd	Course introduction/overview
Jan 26 th	Entrance questionnaire due for completion by 11:59pm on Monday the 26 th of January, we will email everyone on Tuesday the 27 th .
Jan 29 th	Digital Musicianship[?] Lecture: an introduction to audio culture and digital musicianship. Editing with Pro Tools software Lecture/demonstration of Pro Tools software <i>Set assignment 1: autobiographic audio challenge</i>

	<p>Essential reading: 'New technologies, new musicians', in Hugill A. (2008) <i>The Digital Musician</i>. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-14.</p> <p>Suggested reading: 'Music and the New Audio Culture', in Cox, C. and Warner D. (2004) <i>Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music</i>. New York: Continuum, pp. xiii – xvi.</p>
Feb 5 th	<p>Hearing/listening. (Lecture on the work of R. Murray Schafer/Dennis Smalley).</p> <p>Group feedback/critique session on assignment 1</p> <p>***Assignment 1 due today***</p> <p>Essential reading: Smalley, Denis. 'The Listening Imagination: Listening in the Electroacoustic Era'. [http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07494469600640071#UshM4WRdVMM].</p> <p>Suggested reading: 'Stockhausen vs. the "Technocrats"', in Cox, C. and Warner D. (2004) <i>Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music</i>. New York: Continuum, pp. xiii – xvi.</p>
Feb 12 th	<p>Practical workshop: making close/dry stereo recordings Capture sound sources in line with each of Smalley's 'indicative fields' i.e. gesture, utterance, behavior, energy and motion, object/substance, environment, vision.</p> <p>Popular music[?] Lecture introducing ideas from Raymond Williams' 'Popular' and Theodore Adorno's 'On Popular Music'. Also: Bennett Hogg's conceptualization of 'post-vernacular' and Hugill's 'Listening Across the Divide'.</p> <p><i>Set assignment 2: listening across the divide</i></p> <p>Essential reading: 'Critical Engagement' in Hugill, A. (2008) <i>The Digital Musician</i>. New York: Routledge pp. 163 – 186.</p> <p>Suggested reading: 'Popular music and mass culture – Adorno's theory', in Middleton, R. (1990) <i>Studying Popular Music</i>. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 34-63.</p>
Feb 19 th	<p>In-class presentations on assignment 2: listening across the divide</p> <p>***Assignment 2 due***</p> <p>Essential reading: 'Introduction – "An Orchid in the Land of technology"' in Auslander, P. (2008) <i>Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture</i>. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-10.</p>

<p>Feb 26th</p>	<p>Plunderphonics: appropriation and reuse in DJ and sampling culture Lecture on John Oswald, 'Amen break' the emergence of drum and bass, etc...).</p> <p>Musicking/liveness/controllerism Lecture/demonstration relating Christopher Small's ideas of musicking to real-time composition and controllerism using Ableton Live.</p> <p>Essential reading: Oswald, John (1985) Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative [http://www.plunderphonics.com/xhtml/xplunder.html].</p> <p>Suggested reading: Vandemast-Bell, P. (2013) Rethinking Live Electronic Music: A DJ Perspective. Contemporary Music Review, Volume 32, Issue 2-03. [Available here: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07494467.2013.775817#.UsiJi2RdVMM]</p>
<p>March 5th</p>	<p>An introduction to technical ear training Lecture demonstration</p> <p>Group feedback/critique session on assignment 3</p> <p>***Assignment 3 due***</p> <p>Essential reading: Corey, J. (2010) Audio Production and Critical Listening: Technical Ear Training pp. ix -15 [you should read the first chapter as indicated, but should also download and practise regularly with the ear training software available here: http://www.taylorandfrancis.com/cw/corey-9780240812953/p/resources/]</p> <p>Suggested reading: Tinge, P. (2013) Daft Punk; Peter Franco & Mick Guzauski: Recording Random Access Memories, available here: http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/jul13/articles/daft-punk.htm</p>
<p>March 12th</p>	<p>Recording acoustic drum kit Practical session</p> <p>Essential reading: Robjohns, H. (2003) 'Recording Drums', available: http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/feb03/articles/drummiking.asp</p> <p>Suggested reading: Seymour, M. (2010) Engineer's Guide To Tuning and Damping Drums, available: http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/aug10/articles/drum-tuning.htm</p>
<p>March 19th</p>	<p>Processing acoustic drum kit Lecture/demonstration on processing drum kit and incorporating into a mix.</p> <p>Special Feature on Aphex Twin's SAWII</p>

	<p>Essential reading: Danielsen, A. (2010) 'Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction', in Popular Music / Volume 31 / Issue 03 / October 2012, pp 491-492 Cambridge University Press.</p> <p>Suggested reading: White, P. (2001) 'Mixing Multitracked Drums', available: http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/feb01/articles/drummix.asp</p>
March 26 th	<p>***Spring recess/no class</p> <p>As well as finishing assignment 4, I suggest that you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue Corey's ear training exercises (equalization/compression); • think seriously about what you want to do for your final portfolio;
April 2 rd	<p>Group feedback/critique session on assignment 4</p> <p>***Assignment 4 due***</p> <p>Situationism and its affect on punk and popular culture Lecture relating Situationist Manifesto to punk and popular culture</p> <p>Essential reading: Situationist Manifesto, available: http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/manifesto.html</p> <p>Suggested reading: Graham, D. (2009) 'Rock/music writings'. Primary Information, pp. 63 -88 [Essential watching: 'The Birth of Rough Trade Records', available: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddfEqcY-QZk]</p>
April 9 th	<p>Improvisation and the recording studio Lecture/demonstration on a variety of approaches, including a case study on Bennett Hogg.</p> <p>Proposal/presentation session for final portfolio</p> <p>Essential reading: Hogg, B. (2009) 'Sound Objects, Found Objects - Free Improvisation and Electroacoustics', available: http://www.bennethogg.co.uk/?page_id=30.</p> <p>Suggested reading: Ostertag, B. (2002) 'Human Bodies, Computer Music', in Leonardo Music Journal Vol. 12, Pages 11-14, available here: http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/096112102762295070</p>
April 16 th	<p>Noise Lecture relating practitioners such as Merzbo, Lightning Bolt, and Ryoji Ikeda to the thinking of Jaques Attali and Paul Hegarty.</p> <p>Final portfolio critique of work in progress 1 Mixing techniques etc</p>

	<p>Essential reading: Russolo, L. (1913) 'The Art of Noise', available here: http://www.artype.de/Sammlung/pdf/russolo_noise.pdf</p> <p>Suggested reading: Hegarty, P. (2007) 'Noise Music: A History', pp. ix – 37</p>
April 23 rd	<p>Collage/assemblage Lecture/demonstration on a variety of approaches, including a case study on Gwilly Edmondez.</p> <p>Final portfolio critique: work in progress 2 Mixing techniques etc.</p>

April 30th is reading period – work on assignment 5

Assignment 1: autobiographic audio challenge (5% of course mark)
DUE FEBRUARY 5th

IN PREPERATION FOR LATER PROJECTS I SUGGEST YOU USE PRO TOOLS SOFTWARE TO COMPLETE THIS ASSIGNMENT

Using audio samples of one second or less and sourcing your audio materials entirely from your own CD/digital music collection, create a composition of exactly one minute and post it to <http://hubbub.pm>.

You may only use one sample from each song or composition and may only use each sample once.

In undertaking this assignment you should think about what Andrew Hugill in 'The Digital Musician' considers to be the most vital hallmarks of a digital musician (below). The process of creating this work should mean that you improve your skills in each of these categories:

- aural awareness (an ability to hear and listen both widely and accurately, linked to an understanding of how sound behaves in space and time);
- cultural knowledge (an understanding of one's place within a local and global culture coupled with an ability to make critical judgments and a knowledge of recent cultural developments);
- musical abilities (the ability to make music in various ways – performance, improvisation, composition, etc. – using new technologies);
- technical skills (skill in recording, producing, processing, manipulating and disseminating music and sound using digital technologies).

Assignment 2: listening across the divide (5% of course mark)
DUE FEBRUARY 19th

Working in pairs, devise a five-minute presentation that considers the idea of 'post-vernacular' in relation to any single item from Andrew Hugill's list for 'listening across the divide' i.e. the reading this week. A written summary of your presentation must also be uploaded to <http://hubbub.pm> in the form of a blog post.

Laurie Anderson Big Science Warner 2KNM
Aphex Twin Selected Ambient Works Vol. 2 Warp 21 Richard James, aka Aphex Twin.
The Beatles 'White Album': Revolution #9
Glenn Branca The Ascension Acute 9EIPG
Wendy Carlos Brandenburg Concerto No. 3
The Chemical Brothers Surrender Virgin Records XDUSTCD4
Einsturzende Neubaten Strategies Against Architecture Mute STUMM14
Faust The Faust Tapes Recommended RER F2CD
Lou Reed Metal Machine Music BMG ND 90670
Raymond Scott The Pygmy Taxi Corporation Basta Records
Sonic Youth Goodbye 20th Century SYR 4
DJ Spooky Songs of A Dead Dreamer Asphodel ASP0961
Frank Zappa Jazz from Hell Rykodisc RCD 10549

Assignment 3: electroacoustic music project (10% of course mark)
DUE MARCH 5th

Bearing in mind Smalley's indicative fields, and other ideas/artists discussed in class, compose a 3-5 minute electroacoustic work that incorporates a selection of the studio recordings made in class on February the 11th. This should be posted to <http://hubbub.pm> and a short blog post detailing your process and methods should be included.

Assignment 4: drum mix and reinterpretation + plunder (10% of course mark)
DUE APRIL 2nd

This assignment has two elements:

- A short recording (1-3 minutes in length) of a high quality live drum performance with appropriate processing – you should consider the quality of the overall performance, groove, microphone choice, gating, compression, EQ, and should aim for a detailed/contemporary sound. You may add whatever instruments you see fit to make your mix more convincing, but drums should be the main focus.
- A creative remix of the above material (3-5 minutes in length) – this should be a substantial re-interpretation of the *live* performance, and **MUST** feature (in addition) at least one example of audio material plundered from a commercially available source.

Both elements should be posted to <http://hubbub.pm> and a short blog post detailing your process and methods should be included.

Final portfolio of creative work (50% of course mark)
DUE Friday 8th May

The specifics of this are negotiated immediately after spring break. The expectation is that each participant will either produce a four-track EP of total length 12-16 minutes, or make some other multimedia submission in an alternative format (video, website etc). Both work-in-progress and the final versions should be posted on <http://hubbub.pm> - engagement with which is an important component of your final mark (see below). Although you should build upon techniques and ideas explored during assignments 1-4, it is expected that this portfolio will be made up of new work.

In-class participation and contribution to The Hub (20% of course mark)

The Hub: <http://hubbub.pm>

The Hub is a place to share and discuss creative work across disciplines. Originally conceived as an online resource for studio-based composers at universities, the Hub now aims to be both an open-ended forum and an internationally accessible archive, embracing a wide range of creative practices across numerous disciplines.

Publishing an artwork facilitates its contribution to a universal discourse; it doesn't matter who (if anyone) sees/hears it: its being there makes it discoverable and its chronological place in history will always allow it to speak to that moment as well as to future moments. Yet, traditional pedagogy often revolves around scenarios where work is created in isolation (or at best within small-group collaboration/seminars) and then submitted for internal assessment and grading, the consequence of which often being that a work is subsumed within these institutional systems until deemed 'finished' or 'complete' and even then may find no public forum for publication and dissemination.

By contrast, the Hub is a response to the question: can an art work be said to have occurred unless it has been publically presented? It promotes the regular sharing and publishing of work, both 'complete' and 'in progress', with a view to facilitating the development of informed creative practice through discussion of, and engagement with, a broad range of artistic perspectives.

While the Hub exists to informally publish and share practical work, it also reinforces the importance of articulating the conceptual framework of that work through regular blog posts that expound an idea or which critique both theory and practice from within the established discourse.

The main contributors to the Hub are currently staff and students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) at Newcastle University, Brown University, University of Glasgow, and City University London. Collaboration between these institutions is at an initial stage; in due course contributions and appropriation by artists from all four institutions will reshape and redefine the identity of the Hub.

Essential reading:

Hugill A. (2008) *The Digital Musician*. New York: Routledge
Cox, C. and Warner D. (2004) *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. New York: Continuum

Recommended reading

Attali, J. (1985) *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. University of Minnesota Press.
Auslander, P. (2008) *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. New York: Routledge
Bartlett, B. and Bartlett, J., (2009) *Practical Recording Techniques*, Oxford: Focal Press
Christiane, P. (2003) *Digital Art*. London: Thames and Hudson
Collins, N. & d'Esquivan, J. (2007) *Electronic Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Corey, J. (2010) *Audio Production and Critical Listening: Technical Ear Training*
Dyson, M., C., (2007) *Know What I Mean? Reflections on Hip Hop*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
Dodge, C. and Jerse, T. A. (1997) *Computer Music: Synthesis, Composition, and Performance*, 2nd edition. New York: Schirmer Books
Emmerson, S. (2007) *Living Electronic Music*. Aldershot: Ashgate
Graham, D. (2009) 'Rock/music writings'. Primary Information.
Harrison, J. (Ed) *Organised Sound 15:3 Sound ↔ Space: New approaches to multichannel music and audio*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Hegarty, P. (2007) *Noise/Music A History*. New York: Continuum
Henriques, J. (2011) *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques and Ways of Knowing*. London: Continuum Books.
Holmes, T. *Electronic and Experimental Music (fourth edition)*. New York: Routledge.
Kahn, D. (2001) *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*. Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology press
Katz, M. (2010) *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Katz, R., (2007) *Mastering Audio: the art and the science*, Oxford: Focal Press
Manning, P. (1993) *Electronic and Computer Music*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press,
Middleton, R. (1990) *Studying Popular Music*. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp 34-63.
Reynolds, S. (2009) *Bring The Noise: 20 Years of Writing About Hip Rock and Hip Hop*. Berkeley: Soft Skull Press.
Roads, C. (1996) *The Computer Music Tutorial*. Cambridge: Massachusetts: MIT Press.
Russ, M. (2008) *Sound Synthesis and Sampling*, 3rd edition. Oxford: Focal Press.
Schafer, R.M. (1977) *The Soundscape*. New York: Knopf
Sonnenschein, D. (2001) *Sound Design: The Expressive Power of Music, Voice and Sound Effects in Cinema*. California: Michael Wiese.
Wishart, T. (2002) *On Sonic Art*, revised edition. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic