Critical Approaches to Music Technologies: From the Record to Auto-Tune
Department of Music, Summer 2014
Instructor Lucie Vágnerová
Lv2252@columbia.edu

Course Description

The course surveys 20th and 21st century music technologies in avant-garde/experimental as well as mainstream/popular genres. Through assigned readings from various fields, students will explore the way music technologies shape musical discourse at large. We will trace the various ways audio-technological practices trouble traditional concepts such as ownership, authorship, musical value, embodiment, performance, or virtuosity, and call for new constructs such as sound synthesis, Liveness, or 'fair use.'

Course Objectives

Students will develop a vocabulary and devise a writing style to assist in the interpretation of music and develop a critical acuity applicable across the Humanities. Empirical listening experience, the experience of a concert or a sound-art installation, and attention to Internet-based music cultures will also feed class discussions.

Disability Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability and have a DS-certified 'Accommodation Letter,' please email me or talk to me after class to confirm your accommodation needs. If you believe that you might have a disability that requires accommodation, you should contact Disability Services at 212-854-2388 or disability@columbia.edu.

Requirements and Grading
Academic Integrity

> As students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.
>
> Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia.

25% Class participation

> From the Core Office: "Students are expected to attend every session of their Core classes. In the event that a student must miss a class due to religious observance, illness, or family emergency, instructors may strongly encourage (though not require) that students complete

> additional assignments to help make up for lost class participation.
> Whenever possible (in the case of religious holidays, for example),
> students should provide advance notification of absence. Students who
> miss class without instructor permission should expect to have their
> grade lowered."
>
> <u>My own expectations:</u> An "A" for 'class participation will be earned by a
> student who...
> ... arrives on time having done the assigned listening / reading
> ... addresses and debates other students (not only the instructor)
> ... enriches our collective understanding of musical material by making
> connections to other classes and sharing one's personal musical
> experiences
> ... behaves respectfully towards other students and the instructor

If you find it difficult to chime in during class discussion, there are other ways to
show your commitment to the group: for instance, volunteer to read your
homework assignment, email me with a relevant article or resource for the class, or
come to office hours to talk through further strategies. Short, unannounced in-class
writing assignments will also count towards your class participation grade so
especially if you have trouble speaking up, make sure to show up!

15% Participation in discussions on Tick online discussion software
I normally do not permit laptops, tablets, and phones in class to encourage class
participation but I am open to discussing this rule. But, you will participate in
weekly discussions online using Tick discussion software, which facilitates small,
topic-driven discussions around course content. On this platform, we will workshop
topics before we speak about them in class, continue class discussions whenever we
run out of time, and sometimes discuss material that is somewhat tangential to the
course but interesting to the group. Typically, I will upload a piece of media – music,
video, or visuals – along with a question prompt to guide these discussions.

30% Writing Assignment *(probably a short piece on a concert or sound art
installation)*

30% Final Presentation Each student will prepare a short presentation on a topic
of your choice. You may expand upon a topic covered in class or prepare your own.
After every presentation, the floor will open for comments and questions from the
rest of the class for a few minutes.

Resources
The course does not require a textbook: a Live syllabus will be available on
Courseworks, complete with PDFs of all readings, sound files, and links to any web-
based material.

As mentioned, we will also use Tick discussion software.

The Introduction page on Courseworks will link you to many Music e-databases. The Sonic Glossary (linked on Courseworks) is a useful applet defining some of the musical terms we will use in class. I post a short list of covered terminology and concepts on Courseworks after every session so you can check it regularly to be aware of any blind spots.

The class will make a trip to Columbia's Computer Music Center *(during class)* and attend a concert or a sound art installation together *(outside of class).*

Syllabus

Session 1-2
- Introduction to the course
- What is critique? (critical theory, critique as a genre); What is a music technology? **(**Instrumentality, organology); Notation as a technology (questions of access, musical literacy, In-class <u>reading</u> from Katerine Bergeron, "Chant or the Politics of Inscription")

Session 3-4
<u>Reading</u>: Tim J. Anderson, "A Tale of Two Ears: The Concert Hall Aesthetic and Stereo," or Jonathan Sterne, "Is Music a Thing?"
- Recordings (our primary way of accessing material in this class); Analog vs. digital; Early recording technologies; Stereo as 'best seat' in concert hall; How do encoding recording formats shape sound?; Ear as a technology (anatomy, hearing range), private listening practices (portable music players afford unprecedented control over musical sound)

Session 5-6
<u>Reading</u>**:** Jaime E. Oliver La Rosa "Theremin in the Press: Construing 'Electrical Music'
- The Theremin: instrument of the future performing music of the past; Ways of talking about timbre, and the end of its traditional intersection with instrumental technique; Microtonal "gliding" sounds were thought to be the future of music (E. Varese's use of sirens), music unsuited for traditional staff notation.
Schaeffer, Pierre. "Acousmatics," in Audio Cultures: Readings on Modern Music, edited by
- Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 76-81.
- The electronic music studio; Is this the end of performance, traditional notation, concert culture?; Musique concrete, acousmatic sound, Pierre Schaeffer; Theories of musique concrete: divorcing a sound from its source vs. is sound married to its source to begin with?; Embodiment and disembodiment (Pierre Henry: *Vocalises*)

Session 7-8
<u>Review</u>: Wendy Carlos, *Switched on Bach* and "March from A Clockwork Orange," several pieces of media by Laurie Anderson

<u>Reading:</u> Paul Théberge, "Periodicals, the instrument Industry, and Community"
- Sound Synthesis, 1950s Germany, Karlheinz Stockhausen; Wendy Carlos and Vocal Synthesis 1970s United States; Columbia-Princeton Computer Music Center
- Vocal processing in the work of Laurie Anderson: "Vocal drag," voice of authority

Session 9-10
<u>Review:</u> performance video from the performances of Michel Waisvisz and Pamela Z
<u>Reading:</u> Paul Théberge, "The New 'Sound' of Music: Technology and Changing Concepts of Music"
- Gesture controllers; Virtuosity, embodiment, control (instrument vs. controller); the work of Michel Waisvisz and Laetitia Sonami
- Biofeedback technologies; the work of Alvin Lucier and Pamela Z; cyborg musical bodies

Session 11-12
Visit to Computer Music Center *(David Adamczyk has lead Music Hum Classes around the CMC before to great reviews: a similar visit with him or another CMC mainstay would fit in great)*

Session 13-14
<u>Reading:</u> Casey Man Kong Lum, "Karaoke and the Construction of Identity," or Carol Vernallis, "Strange People, Weird Objects: The Nature of Narrativity, Character, and Editing in Music Videos," or Mark Grimshaw, "Playing with Sound: The Role of Music and Sound Effects in Gaming," or Kiri Miller, "How Musical is *Guitar Hero?*" and associated media.
- Karaoke; nationality, sexuality, and musicality; lip-synching; the Milli Vanilli scandal, Auto-Tune
- Video as music technology; from MTV to Youtube; music in computer games

Session 15-16
<u>Reading:</u> George E. Lewis, "Improvising Tomorrow's Bodies: The Politics of Transduction."
Lewis, George E. "Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives,"
Black Music Research 16:1 (1996): 91-122.
- Live Coding and other computer music practices; Improvisation and interactivity in computer music, and the discursive tension between these terms
- Turntablism, cutting, scratching, phase shifting, back spinning; Otomo Yoshihide, Christian Marclay; Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa; turntablism in hiphop and 'art' music through the lens of race

Session 17-18
<u>Reading</u>: Joseph G. Schloss "Sampling Effects," or Thomas D. Schumacher, "This is a Sampling Sport: Digital Sampling, Rap Music and the Law in Cultural Production," or Ben Williams, "Black Secret Technology: Detroit Techno and the Information Age," and associated media

- Hip-hop and sampling; 'fair use' clause; music and authorship
- Analog vs. digital; Detroit Techno and Blackness: analog synthesizers and drum machines; Electro dance music: fans protest the overuse of certain plug-ins that mimic analog sounds

Session 19-20
Reading: Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut: "Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane" or Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs, Writing Feminism: Reading the Body in Contemporary Culture," and video of Coachella 2012 hologram effect of Tupac Shakur and a Vocaloid performance by Japanese hologram effect Hatsune Miku
- The concept of Live performance after the emergence of recording technologies; Live music, the paradox of 'Live recordings' (racialization and genre bias)
- Vocaloid Holograms and post-Live music technologies; Issues of embodiment: the line separating the body and technology is socially inscribed

Session 21-22
Student presentations