21M.361 Composing with Computers I (Electronic Music Composition)
Spring 2008

MODULE ONE: Musique Concrète, Form and Content
(3 weeks)

Studio basics, recording, Musique Concrète, representation, basics of Pro Tools software, detailed structure. We will learn our way around the studio, record sounds, develop ways of abstracting form and content, devise scores, and compose using our recorded sounds. All the listening will be musique concrète, manifest in various ways, some of which we will explore in later modules. Compositional structure is dealt with at the end of the module, though this isn't so much represented in the listening. The compositional focus in this module is on breaking things up and putting them together with a clear mind to form. Later modules focus on things like layering and continuity.

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Lab 1.1 MANDATORY: Studio rules, studio paradigm, Mac basics, network stuff, folder protocol, Pro Tools basics such as creating tracks, importing, recording, cutting, shuffling or slipping, bouncing.

Assignment 1.1 (due next class)**: Recording Sounds, Basic Studio Technique**
1. Using any recording equipment available to you (MD/DAT/cassette/video/HD/memory recorder, cellphone, computer, dictation thingy, etc.), **record a large number (20ish?) of isolated sounds**. These should be intentionally recorded, i.e., not just plucked from a longer recording session; they will in all likelihood be from a single source (broadly defined), and somehow can be heard as the intended sound. To clarify: these sounds should be short—0.5s to 20s. There are two varieties: sounds you cause to happen, and record; and sounds you just happen to record or find and record, without you causing the sound. Both are acceptable. By single source I don't mean all you sounds should come from the same source; rather, each individual sound has a single source, e.g. a glass being tapped, as opposed to a glass being tapped while someone slurps some soup. **Also record a long sound, 1–2 minutes**. This should not have intentional sounds in it, i.e., don't plan for sounds to happen. Just record a stretch of sound you think will be interesting. Some variety in the sound should make Assignment 1.3 a little easier. In all recordings please avoid bathrooms; when we forget to mention this, we tend to get several bathroom recordings. What happens in the bathroom should stay in the bathroom.
2. Transfer your sounds to a Pro Tools session **via the auxiliary cable** (and not by importing) onto a single (pair of) track(s). **Edit out everything except your 8 favorite short sounds, and your long sound. Bounce to a single file** (your 8 short sounds followed by your long sound, each separated by small silences long enough for you to be able to announce in class what the sound is) and copy (not

move) the file into the ass-1.1 folder, named (with your name) 'peter-1.1.aif.' To copy a file on a Mac, option-drag it; or highlight it and type command-c, and where you want to put it, command-v. Unless otherwise specified, the only acceptable soundfile format is aif.

Listening 1.1 (due next lab):
Compulsory
Bob Ostertag—Sooner Or Later (part one) (1991)
Iannis Xenakis—Concret PH (1958)
Alan Lamb—Beauty (from Primal Image) (1986)
Jack Body—Prelude: Azan (Call to Prayer) (from Suara - Environmental Music From Java) (1993)
Jack Body—Epilogue: Sawangan (Pigeon Whistles) (from Suara - Environmental Music From Java) (1993)
Recommended
Pierre Schaeffer—Étude aux chemins de fer (1948)
Sarah Peebles—First Kitchen (South Shinjuku Area) (from 108—Walking Through Tokyo...) (2002)
John Cage—Williams Mix (1952)

Class 1.1: Listening to Assignment 1.1, discussing Listening 1.1

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Lab 1.2: Going over the basics again, addressing problems, Pro Tools/compositional techniques such as layering, duplication, fades, volume and pan automation, faking echoes and reverb.

Assignment 1.2 (due next class): **Technical Composition, Abstracting Scores**
1. Using Pro Tools, cut your first assignment into its 9 components (8 short sounds and 1 long sound) and make them separate files, nicely edited. **Using only your short sounds, i.e., not your long sound, compose a piece** using all the Pro Tools techniques you have learnt. Nothing more, i.e., **no effects or inserts, no extra sounds**. This composition should be purely technical, to show that you have mastered basic Pro Tools editing, and that you have grasped some basics in electronic composition. Don't worry about expression or general musicality. This is a purely technical exercise. Aim for **2 to 3 minutes**. Copy your bounced composition into the ass-1.2 folder, etc.
2. **Make a descriptive score of your long sound**. Be creative, or boring. Your score should somehow represent your long sound, not just to you, but hopefully also to someone else. If, for example, you plot loudness, you needn't label the graph as representing loudness. The score will be used for your next composition, and the description of a parameter you have abstracted from your long sound might be used to prescribe another parameter in your next composition. Do not try to account for everything in the long sound.

Listening 1.2 (due next lab):

Compulsory

Holgar Czukay—Boat-Woman-Song (1968)

Stefan Helmreich—Matrix 12510-2 (from Xerophonics) (2003)

Steve Reich—Come Out (1966)

Evan Ziporyn—Postcard (w/ Ava, Simon, & Skyler) (2001)

Peter Whincop—My red-haired girl (2005)

Recommended

Stefan Helmreich—Xerox 5828 (from Xerophonics) (2003)

Forrest Larson—Urban Sanctuary (from Timbre Harvest) (1994)

Forrest Larson—Long Short Waves (from Timbre Harvest) (1999)

Student

Chaitra Chandrasekhar, Daniel Hochbaum, Graham Woolley, Greg Schroll, Kelsey Byers, Mats Ahlgren, Matt Gordon, PJ Steiner, Rae Zucker, Roland Tung, Sheldon Hewlett, Tilly Whitney, Zach Rich

Class 1.2:   Listening to Assignment 1.2, discussing Listening 1.2

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Lab 1.3: Pro Tools recording automation, 'tape' speeding up and slowing down, trying out more compositional ideas with our sounds, master fader.

Assignment 1.3 (due next class): **Real Composition Based On Score**

Using your score from Assignment 1.2, **compose a piece using only your short sounds. All your short sounds must be used**. Use all the 'tape' techniques in Pro Tools we have learned so far. Forget about your long sound; you are working from the score. You are not trying to recreate the long sound. This is a real composition, one that you should feel comfortable living with and saying is yours. It should be expressive or somehow else **musical**, not just a technical exercise. It should be as long as you think it should be; 30s to whatever your score suggests.

Listening 1.3 (**abbreviated**, due next lab):

Compulsory

Gavin Bryars—Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet (1975 Eno Obscure label version)

Fennesz—013 +- 6.18 (from Plus Forty Seven Degrees 56' 37" Minus Sixteen Degrees 51' 08") (1999)

Erdem Helvacioglu—Wandering Around the City (2003)

Paul Lansky—Pattern's Patterns (from Alphabet Book) (2002)

Kaffe Matthews—in search of a bun, 8 (from cd dd) (2001)

Recommended

Tod Dockstader—Traveling Music (from Apocalypse) (1961)

Pink Floyd—Bike (from The Piper at the Gates of Dawn) (1967)

Francisco López—La Selva (excerpt) (from La Selva) (1998)

Kaffe Matthews—the last of the violins, 14 (from cd dd) (2001)

Student

Alex Vazquez, Andrew McPherson, Andrew Harlan, Austin Taranta, Christian Camargo, Ed Platt, Eduardo Coutinho, Graham Woolley, Hubert Roberts, Katie Olsen, Kristen Burrall, Mats Ahlgren, Matt Gordon, Michael Miller, Michelle Fogerson, Rae Zucker, Sari Canelake, Sheldon Hewlett, Tilly Whitney

Class 1.3: **CRITIQUE** (due next lab). Looking at score from 1.2, listening to Assignment 1.3, discussing Listening 1.3.

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