

MUSI E-190r: Technomusicology

(CRN: 25695; 4 Credits)

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OVERVIEW

In this course we make audio and video art that probes the interplay between music and technology since the dawn of sound reproduction and especially in the digital age. Embracing such technologies ourselves, we use popular, powerful music software (Ableton Live) to explore new techniques and idioms by composing a series of études, or studies in particular media forms.

Readings, discussions, and projects focus on historically significant forms—soundscapes, mashups, supercuts, DJ mixes, podcasts—and how they emerge via new technologies and new cultural practices. Irrespective of one's experience with musical composition or audio software, the études offer shared conceptual ground to all while accommodating novice experimentation or virtuoso programming.

Students develop a familiarity with the history of sound media while cultivating competencies in audio and video editing, sampling and arranging, mixing and remixing, as well as in critical listening, writing, and discussion. By the end of the course, each will have produced a portfolio of seven peer-reviewed, carefully framed, and relatively polished pieces.

Class sessions comprise discussions of readings and audio-visual examples, software demonstrations, and collective workshopping of our projects. Readings and other materials are available as PDFs and URLs via the course site:

<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/69693>

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

1) Études	50%
2) Peer Reviews	25%
3) Class Discussions	25%

While we will accommodate students joining from a distance, please note that punctual attendance, submission of assignments, and peer feedback are crucial to the class's success. As a project-oriented course, we spend about half our time workshopping projects together, in realtime during class and asynchronously online. Completing études on time and offering timely online comments to classmates are essential duties and a significant part of the overall grade.

We use online forums to engage in ongoing, open discussion of pertinent materials as well as focused, weekly discussions of the readings for each module. Reading these texts in advance of class will enhance our discussions. Responses to weekly prompts about the readings are due prior to the first meeting of each of the 7 units of the course (i.e., during the introductory, theory-centered week of each unit; not the practical, hands-on week). Posts to the general forum are welcome any time, and I encourage students to develop our community conversation, including commenting on or liking peers' posts. (Please keep the discourse positive and polite.)

Students will post their draft études for each unit during the following week, and classmates will be required to offer constructive criticism before class. Études should be between 1-3 minutes long, and will be due, along with a brief but rigorous “artist statement” (150-300 words) by midnight on Tuesday of the week we are discussing them. Final submissions are due the following Tuesday by midnight. Études will be graded according to a rubric that places emphasis on conceptualization, contextualization, and execution. Being as clear as possible about your process – thought process, research process, audio processing (and arrangement, etc.) – and how it relates to your production will ensure that you are rewarded for your efforts.

Each étude will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- 1) Thoughtfulness, and demonstrated research, in selection of subject, site, and/or materials
- 2) Contextualization: i.e., attention to history and other contexts / pertinence to class concepts / relation to other works
- 3) Formal execution / attention to detail
- 4) Meets requirements, or justifies departures

After the submission deadline, each student who submits an étude will be assigned to review 2 peers' projects before we meet in class. Reviews can be brief but should be constructive and concrete, offering not only encouragement but specific reference to your peer's realization of their concept and suggestions for bringing it into greater audibility. Please make time in your mid-week schedules for completing the peer reviews. 25% of your overall grade will be assessed based on the quality and timeliness of these reviews.

Students taking the class for graduate credit are expected to engage at an appropriately advanced level, including more formal requirements with regard to written assignments: reading responses and artist statements should be carefully composed and between 200-300 words. Graduate-credit students will also submit an expanded final artist statement (500 words) in the last week of class, reflecting on their portfolio from the term and how the course might inform future work.

ACCESSIBILITY

The Extension School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Accessibility Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. Please visit www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/disability-services-accessibility for more information.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Extension School policies on academic integrity (www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-conduct/academic-integrity) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting the wrong draft, or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. There are no excuses for failure to uphold academic integrity. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Harvard Extension School Tips to Avoid Plagiarism (www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/tips-avoid-plagiarism), where you'll find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources and two free online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.

SCHEDULE

Week 1 / January 30

Introduction to Technomusicology

Gould, Glenn. "The Prospects of Recording." In *Audio Culture*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, 115-26. New York and London: Continuum, 2004.

Wald, Elijah. "Amateurs and Executants." In *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music*, 13-24 (esp 13-17). New York: Oxford, 2009.

Assignment: Come prepared to discuss the readings in class, and post a response to our opening discussion forum prompt. Please post an introduction on the appropriate forum as well.

Week 2 / February 6

UNIT 1: Soundscapes: Theories & Approaches

Schafer, R. Murray. "The Music of the Environment." In *Audio Culture*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, 29-39. New York and London: Continuum, 2004.

Marshall, Wayne. "Love That Muddy Ether: Pirate Multiculturalism and Boston's Secret Soundscape." *Cluster Mag*. December 2011.

Assignment: Post a response to this Unit's discussion forum prompt before we meet in class.

**Week 3 /
February 13**

UNIT 1: Making & Workshopping Soundscapes

Étude #1: Compose a soundscape collage from your own local recordings. Include description of subject, methods, and "poetics" or aesthetic choices. (draft due: 11:59pm, Feb 11 by midnight; final submission due: 11:59pm, Feb 18 by midnight)

Requirements: No non-diegetic sound (i.e., you may only use your own sound recordings); your soundscapes can include music, but only if captured in ambient context. Even with "realist" approaches, we expect a fair amount of editing, manipulation, and arrangement of your audio.

**Week 4 /
February 20**

UNIT 2: Ethics and Aesthetics of Digital Sampling

Schloss, Joseph G. "Elements of Style: Aesthetics of Hip-hop Composition." In *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-hop*, 135-168. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004.

Katz, Mark. "Music in 1s and 0s." In *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*, 137-57. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Assignment: Post a response to this Unit's discussion forum prompt before we meet in class.

**Week 5 /
February 27**

UNIT 2: Making and Workshopping Sample-Based Beats

Étude #2: Compose a sample-based beat using a classic breakbeat and one additional recording of your choice, carefully and purposefully selected. Explain why you have selected the additional track and how your choice relates to debates about the ethics of sampling. (draft due: Tuesday, Feb 25 by midnight; final submission due: Tuesday, March 3 by midnight)

Requirements: All samples must be less than one second long, and you may only sample from the provided breakbeat and ONE additional recording (from which you may use as many <1 second samples as you like). While you are welcome to compose in any style or genre, we expect more than a simple loop or two: in other words, aim for a multi-measure structure of some sort.

**Week 6 /
March 5**

UNIT 3: Mashup Poetics

McGranahan, Liam. "It Goes Beyond Having a Good Beat and I Can Dance to It': Mashup Aesthetics and Creative Process." In *Mashnography: Creativity, Consumption, and Copyright in the Mashup Community*, 35-70. Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 2010.

Marshall, Wayne. "Mashup Poetics as Pedagogical Practice." In *Pop-Culture Pedagogy in the Music Classroom Teaching Tools from American Idol to YouTube*, ed. Nicole Biamonte, 307-15. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010.

Assignment: Post a response to this Unit's discussion forum prompt before we meet in class.

**Week 7 /
March 12**

UNIT 3: Making and Workshopping Mashups

Étude #3: Make a mashup using 2 (or more) related recordings. Include notes discussing thematic and/or musical linkages (i.e., poetics). (draft due: Tuesday, March 10 by 11:59pm; final submission due: Tuesday, March 24 by 11:59pm)

Requirements: Your finished mashup should contain a preponderance of simultaneous sources: i.e., the majority of the track should involve two or more recordings playing at once (not simply in alternation).

**Week 8 /
March 19**

Spring Recess

**Week 9 /
March 26**

UNIT 4: DJ-style Mixing & Conceptual Mixtapes

Katz, Mark. "Mix and Scratch—The Turntable Becomes a Musical Instrument: 1975-1978." In *Groove Music: The Art and Culture of the Hip-hop DJ*, 43-69. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Fikentscher, Kai. "There's Not a Problem I Can't Fix, 'Cause I Can Do It in the Mix': On the Performative Technology of 12-Inch Vinyl." In *Music and Technoculture*, ed. René Lysloff and Leslie C. Gay, 290-315. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003.

Assignment: Post a response to this Unit's discussion forum prompt before we meet in class.

**Week 10 /
April 2**

UNIT 4: Making and Workshopping Mini-Mega-Mixes

Étude #4: Produce a brief DJ-style mix guided by some logic of musical, cultural, and/or historical connection between the recordings involved. Make efforts to use blends, cuts, and other edits/segues strategically. Include notes explaining aesthetic choices and narrative (i.e., poetics). (draft due: Tuesday, March 31 by 11:59pm; final submission due: Tuesday, April 7 by 11:59pm)

Requirements: While some amount of overlap/blending (and therefore beat-matching) is expected—to differing degrees depending on the style of DJing—a sequential rather than simultaneous presentation should prevail.

**Week 11 /
April 9**

UNIT 5: Musical Supercuts in the Age of YouTube

Jenkins, Henry. "If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead."
<http://henryjenkins.org/2009/02/if_it_doesnt_spread_its_dead_p.html>

Driscoll, Kevin. "Soulja Boy and Dance Crazes." In *Spreadable Media*, ed. Jenkins, Ford, & Green. New York: NYU Press, 2013.<<http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/driscoll/>>

Turner, David. "Inside Atlanta's Booming Hip-Hop Dance Scene." *MTV News*, 23 March 2016.
<<http://www.mtv.com/news/2798081/inside-atlantas-booming-hip-hop-dance-scene/>>

Assignment: Post a response to this Unit's discussion forum prompt before we meet in class.

**Week 12 /
April 16**

UNIT 5: Making and Workshopping Musical Supercuts

Étude #5: Create a YouTube-sourced supercut that provides a survey of the “social life” of a particular song or dance. (draft due: Tuesday, April 14 by 11:59pm; final submission due: Tuesday, April 21 by 11:59pm)

Requirements: Supercuts should include at least 6 different video sources, and they should be “musical” insofar as efforts are made to beat-match, harmonize, and otherwise arrange clips so they progress in a musically-entraining fashion.

**Week 13 /
April 23**

UNIT 6: Podcast Era Sound Design

Mitchell, Jonathan. “Using Music.” *Transom*.
<<http://transom.org/?p=40865>>

Hudelson, Joshua. “Listening to Whisperers: Performance, ASMR Community and Fetish on YouTube.” *Sounding Out!*, 10 December 2012.
<<https://soundstudiesblog.com/2012/12/10/whisper-community/>>

Assignment: Post a response to this Unit’s discussion forum prompt before we meet in class.

**Week 14 /
April 30**

UNIT 6: Making and Workshopping Podcasts

Etude #6: Create a brief, sound-designed audio narrative combining voices, music, and foley-style effects where appropriate. (draft due: Tuesday, April 28 by 11:59pm; final submission due: Tuesday, May 5 by 11:59pm)

Requirements: While the shapes and subjects are wide open for this one, all podcasts should feature some amount of explicit sound design, subtle or conspicuous, involving vocals (your own or someone else’s), music, and effects.

**Week 15 /
May 7**

UNIT 7: Final Projects: Choose Your Own Adventure

Building on our technomusicological toolkit, our final projects are exercises in applying and exploring the possibilities. You are encouraged to conceive of a technomusicological form that we have not covered. Examples might include:

video remixes / re-scorings, sound-designed videos, AI-assisted musical productions—or even how what we’ve learned might help to shape a song / composition.

Assignment: Make a proposal for your final project by describing the concept, placing it into historical and cultural context, and explaining how it draws or builds on some of the techniques and ideas we’ve played with this semester.

**Week 16 /
May 14**

UNIT 7: Workshopping Final Projects

Etude #7: Create a “technomusicological” production of your own conception. (draft due: Tuesday, May 12 by 11:59pm; **final submission due: Saturday, May 16 by 11:59pm**)

Requirements: Projects can be scholarly, journalistic, or purely creative in nature, but they should all in some way explore the affordances of digitally mediated sound production – and audibly so. Collaborations are welcome, but be clear about each person’s contributions.

Final Artist's Statements Due (graduate credit): **May 16**, by 11:59pm