



## Experimental Music in Theory and Practice

Fall 2014  
Lerner Center, Room 102

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Office hours: By appointment

John Cage neatly defined as experimental “an act the outcome of which is unknown.” Following Cage’s lead, in this course we will take the unknown, chance, and indeterminacy as starting points for our investigation into the diverse set of artistic practices known as “experimental music.” We will explore experimental music as both a historical phenomenon with major protagonists, classic texts, and essential musical works, and as a living tradition of questions, debates, and techniques that remain provocative and unsettled in the early twenty-first century. How does the experimental ethos reflect the values of the “post-traditional” society in which we live? What new possibilities are opened up by the relinquishment of artistic control over all elements of the artwork? How can the ideals of experimental music point the way toward musical practices that are more fluid, participatory, and rewarding than present alternatives? These are a few of the big questions we will consider in this class.

In our work together, we will move between two distinct but closely related fields of activity: first, a seminar-style ongoing conversation based on focused reading and listening assignments; and second, a series of in-class workshop exercises and performances of key pieces. We will also touch on such related phenomena as serialism, process music, and algorithmic composition, and we will consider how both the theories and practices of experimental music relate to broader questions about nature, technology, politics, and pedagogy.

### Course texts

The two required texts for this course are:

- Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- Alvin Lucier, *Music 109: Notes on Experimental Music* (Wesleyan University Press, 2012)

All other readings will be made available on the course website.

### Format

The course consists of two types of sessions: seminar-style discussions based on reading and listening assignments, and workshops devoted to preparing and performing pieces.

### Workshops

There are six workshop sessions scheduled over the course of the semester. These are class sessions set aside for playing some of the music we are reading about and listening to. The pieces we play will be determined on an ongoing basis rather than scheduled at the beginning of the semester, and can include “classic” works, exercises, and original pieces composed by members of the class. Workshops may also include visits from special guest musicians and composers.

### **Hosts**

Each student must “host” two class meetings (discussion sessions, not workshops). This means spending extra time with the readings, saying a bit at the beginning of class to introduce the material, and guiding the discussion as necessary. Hosting obligations will be scheduled during the first week of class.

Students who are not “host” are in no way exonerated from preparing for class!

### **Forum posts**

Over the course of the semester, you must write at least four posts to the online forums. These should be short (1-2 pages) but polished. They can be in response to the readings, performances, class discussion, or anything else that might be relevant. At least one of your posts must be a response to someone else’s; in this case the same requirements apply.

### **Final projects**

The nature and scope of the final project will be determined collectively by the class. My inclination is for you not to write term papers. Ideally, I would like for us to create something meaningful and public, such as a website and/or a symposium where we present papers, performances, etc., based on our work in the class. The last three class sessions of the semester have been set aside for additional work relating to the final project.

### **Attendance**

Because of the small and intensive nature of this course, attendance is especially important. Any unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade for class participation.

### **Grading**

Participation: 25%

Hosting: 25%

Forum writing: 25%

Final project: 25%

### **Schedule**

SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT ANY TIME!

All reading/listening must be done in advance of the class session for which it is listed.

**Thursday, 8/28      Introduction and Overview**

**Tuesday, 9/2      Starting Points**

#### Reading

- Nyman, “Towards (a definition of) experimental music” and “Backgrounds” (EM, pp. 1-49)

**Thursday, 9/4      John Cage**

#### Reading

- John Cage, “Experimental Music” and “Compositions as Process, II: Indeterminacy”
- Lucier, “Indeterminacy” (*Music 109*, pp. 12-22)
- Kyle Gann, “4’33” at First Listening”

**Tuesday, 9/9 Indeterminacy in Music B.C. (Before Cage)**Reading

- Guido of Arezzo, excerpt from *Micrologus*
- Oxford Music Online: "Soggetto cavato"
- Hedges, "Dice Music in the Eighteenth Century"

Music

- Mozart: *Musikalische Würfelspiele*
- Marcel Duchamp: *Erratum musical* (1913)

Assignment for Thursday 9/11: Create your own set of rules for making a "random" piece of music and bring it to the next class.

**Thursday, 9/11 Workshop #1**

Home-made chance music and more (TBD)

**Tuesday, 9/16 The New York School**Reading

- Nyman, "Inauguration 1950-60: Feldman, Brown, Wolff, Cage" (EM, pp. 50-71)
- Christian Wolff, "Experimental Music around 1950 and Some Consequences and Causes"

Music

- Morton Feldman, *Intersection 3* (1953)
- Earle Brown, *December 1952*
- Christian Wolff, *Trio I* (1950)

**Thursday, 9/18 European Responses**Reading

- Pierre Boulez, "Alea"
- Umberto Eco, "The Poetics of the Open Work"

Music

- Pierre Boulez, Third Piano Sonata
- Luciano Berio, *Sequenza No. 1* for flute

CONCERT EVENT: Berio, 14 Sequenzas (September 18-20):  
<http://www.bowerbird.org/newsite/events/berio/>

**Tuesday, 9/23 Workshop #2****Thursday, 9/25 Notation and Graphic Scores**Reading

- R. Murray Schafer, "The Graphics of Musical Thought"
- David Behrman, "What Indeterminate Notation Determines"
- Nikolaos-Laonikos Psimikakis-Chalkokondylis, "An Investigation of the Extent to which Developments in Notation in the 1950s and 1960s Have Informed Current Compositional Practices"

Music

- *Notations* (browse)

**Tuesday, 9/30      The New York School, 2**Reading

- Frank Sani, "Morton Feldman's *Durations I: A Discussion*"
- Frederic Rzewski, "The Algebra of Everyday Life"
- Earle Brown, "Form in New Music"

Music

- Morton Feldman, *Durations I* (1960)
- Earle Brown, *String Quartet* (1965)
- Christian Wolff, *Exercise No. 3* (1973)

**Thursday, 10/2      Play, Performance, and Theater**Reading

- Johan Huizinga, "Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon"
- Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (excerpts)
- Bertolt Brecht, "Emphasis on Sport"

**Tuesday, 10/7      Workshop #3****Thursday, 10/9      NO CLASS—FALL BREAK****Tuesday, 10/14      Musicological Interlude**Reading

- Leonard B. Meyer, "The End of the Renaissance?"
- Carl Dahlhaus, "On the Decline of the Concept of the Musical Work"

**Thursday, 10/16      Cornelius Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra**Reading

- Nyman, "Indeterminacy 1960–70: Ichiyanagi, Ashley, Wolff, Cardew, Scratch Orchestra" (EM, 110-138)
- Tony Harris, "Scratch: Embodiment and Change"
- Cornelius Cardew, "A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution"

Music

- Cardew, *The Great Learning*

**Tuesday, 10/21      Workshop #4****Thursday, 10/23      Minimalism**Reading

- Nyman, "Minimal music, determinacy, and the new tonality" (EM, pp. 139-171)
- Steve Reich, "Music as a Gradual Process"

Music

- La Monte Young, *Trio for Strings* (1958)
- Terry Riley, *In C* (1964)
- Steve Reich, *Piano Phase* (1968)

**Tuesday, 10/28      Systems Music**Reading

- Michael Nyman, "Against Intellectual Complexity in Music"
- Brian Dennis, "Repetitive and Systemic Music"
- Michael Parsons, "Systems in Art and Music"

Music

- Frederich Rzewski, *Les moutons de panurge* (1974)
- John White, *Drinking and Hooting Machine* (1968)

**Thursday, 10/30      Workshop #5****Tuesday, 11/4      50<sup>th</sup> anniversary performance of *In C* (details TBD)****Thursday, 11/6      Electronics**Reading

- Michael Nyman, "Electronic Systems" (EM, pp. 89-109)
- Matt Rogalsky, "The Art of David Tudor, 1963-1992"

Music

- David Tudor, *Rainforest* (1968)
- Steve Reich, *Pendulum Music* (1968)
- Alvin Lucier, *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1970)

CONCERT EVENT: <fidget> Fall Experimental Music Festival  
November 6-9 (details TBA)

**Tuesday, 11/11      Improvisation**Reading

- Cornelius Cardew, "Toward an Ethics of Improvisation"
- George Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives"
- Frederic Rzewski, "Little Bangs: A Nihilist Theory of Improvisation"

Music

TDB

**Thursday, 11/13      Workshop #6****Tuesday, 11/18      Prose Scores**Reading

- Christoph Schulz, "Scores in Prose"

Music (browse only)

- Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Aus den sieben Tagen* (1968) and *Für kommende Zeiten* (1970)
- Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (1974)
- Christian Wolff, *Prose Collection* (1968-71)
- Christopher Hobbs, *Word Pieces* (1966-70)

Assignment

Choose one prose piece from the above collections (or write your own) and be ready to discuss/perform it

**Thursday, 11/20      Pedagogy**Reading

- Panagiotos Kanellopoulos, “Experimental music in music education: Promises and conflicts”
- Brian Dennis, “Experimental School Music”
- Shanna Sordahl, “Experiential Engagement in Experimental Music and Alternative Education”

Music (browse)

- László Sáry, *Creative Music Education*
- R. Murray Schafer, *A Sound Education and Ear Cleaning*

**Tuesday, 11/25      Algorithmic and Generative Music**Reading

- David Toop, “The Generation Game: Experimental Music and Digital Culture”
- Brian Eno, “Organizing and Generating Variety in the Arts”

**Thursday, 11/27** (NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING)**Tuesday, 12/2** Additional workshops or class sessions / Planning for final projects**Thursday, 12/4** Additional workshops or class sessions / Planning for final projects**Tuesday, 12/9** Additional workshops or class sessions / Planning for final projects