Example Syllabus: Introduction to Electronic Music Composition and History

This module will allow students to produce electronic music in response to strategic listening assignments presented within their historical context. Students will be assessed both on their production skills and on their knowledge of electronic music history.

A one-hour lab each week will focus on listening and production skills related to the topic area being covered.

Assignment Overview

Composition and Commentary 1: The composition should be **2 - 5min** in length and the commentary must be a minimum of 500 words.

Composition and Commentary 2: The composition should be **4 - 7min** in length and the commentary must be a minimum of 500 words.

Guidelines

Does the composition show an understanding of some of the production methods of electronic music?

Does the composition succeed according to the composer's stated intentions in the commentary?

Does the critical commentary describe the intentions of the composition?

Does the critical commentary describe, where appropriate, the technical and compositional processes in the composition?

Does the critical commentary demonstrate, where appropriate, an understanding of some of the following:

- the historical background or context of production techniques used in the composition
- the historical background or context of tools and technologies used in the composition.
- the historical background or context of compositional ideas or musicological traits of the composition.
- the historical background or context (for example genres or historical practices) which the composition draws upon.

Week 1 - Early Instruments, Early Studios, Musique Concrète

- Introductions
- Course overview, aims
- What is Electronic Music? And Why Electronic Music?
- Origins: Technology and Ideas
- Intro to Musique Concrète and the GRM
- Varèse, Xenakis, and the 1958 World Expo in Brussels
- Other Early Studios / Composers

Week 2: Early Studios (continued), Elektronische Musik, Krautrock

WDR and Elektronische Musik (Cologne)
WDR vs GRM
Aesthetic Motivations: Serialism
Karlheinz Stockhausen
Krautrock
Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center (NYC)
San Francisco Tape Music Center (SF)
Bebe and Louis Barron (NYC)
Raymond Scott (NYC)

Week 3: Radiophonics and Early Computer Music

- Sound Design Context
- BBC Radiophonics Workshop
- Daphne Oram
- Delia Derbyshire
- Bell Labs
- Max Mathews
- Music 1-5

Week 4 - Dub and the Studio as Instrument

- Origins The Sound System
- Dubplates and "Versions"
- King Tubby and Lee "Scratch" Perry
- The Virus Spreads...

Week 5 - Sampling and Looping

- Origins of Sampling
  - Review: Schaeffer, etc.
  - Sampling with: notes, text, objects, images

- Why Sample?
- Sampling Technology
- The Loop as Composition (Riley, Reich)
- Hip Hop / Turntablism

- Industrial
- Plunderphonics and the Remix

Week 6 - Drone, Ambient, Minimalism

- Terminology/HierarchyDrones in History
- La Monte Young / Eliane Radigue
- Roots of Ambient Music (Satie, Eno)
- Ambient Music vs. Ambient Sound
- Related movements/genres

Week 7 Techno / House / Dance Music Genres

While there is no formal lecture this week, I ask that you watch the following documentary on the history of electronic music specifically centred on techno and dance genres. I will post an accompanying playlist for Wednesday:

https://vimeo.com/361554324

Please also listen to the Resident Adviser feature podcast on Rrose (a fairly famous industrial techno producer). I am trying to organize a remote question and answer session for you with this artist to get a sense of what it is like to have a career as a modern electronic musician. Anyone who would like to participate <u>must</u> have listened to the podcast in advance for context.

https://www.residentadvisor.net/podcast-episode.aspx?id=318

Week 8: Noise and Feedback

Hidden from students

- Origins: The Art of Noises revisited
- Political Motivations
- Sonic qualities
- Industrial Music
- Feedback and Process
- Japanese Noise
- No Input Mixing Console
- Noise and Feedback in Rock

Week 9: Glitch / Microsound / Circuit Bending

TBD.

Additional Reading:

Please note: I have included the reading list for this module with this handout, however, the numerical ID of the weeks differ as they correspond to the terms of my current institution. The list is large but with few essential readings. It's meant to serve as a corpus of music journalism students may access for their commentaries.