

TECH 350: SAMPLING, REMIX, AND DECOMPOSITION

INSTRUCTOR: Heather Mease, hmease@oberlin.edu

CLASS MEETING: Fall 2023, T/R 3:00 – 4:15 @ Performance Technology Lab (Rm. 014)

OFFICE HOUR: **TBD** and by appointment for in-person & virtual meetings

OVERVIEW

Students will explore a wide variety of techniques to create something from something with care and intentionality. Electrify a piece in the spirit of the late 1960's *Switched-On Moog* explosion. Take apart a masterwork by your favorite (or least favorite) composer and collage it into an absolute monstrosity. Put your beatmaking cap on and sample breaks from vinyl. Generate music from text using AI tools and then contemplate the ethical, aesthetic, and hauntological potentials. Curate a mix of the class's tracks that transforms the music through time, juxtaposition, and a few DJing tricks. Student responsibilities include reading, watching, and listening assignments; frequent sketches and compositions; class discussions and activities; presentations; and participation in sharing + feedback sessions. Students are encouraged to contribute their own inputs to share with class such as music examples, articles, videos, or techniques from their individual toolboxes.

LEARNING GOALS

Through this course, students will develop a personal style and approach to course concepts with a focus on creativity and experimentation through the creation of a portfolio of projects. The class will regularly present these projects for peer and instructor feedback. Students will develop frameworks to intelligently and carefully analyze, interpret, and critique work that engages sampling, remix, recomposition, and appropriation more broadly. This includes thoughtful and critical evaluation of power dynamics and context when borrowing and interacting with borrowed ideas. Students will practice these skills in classroom discussion. In addition, the class will become familiar with transformative fair use, particularly within an educational context.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

To achieve course learning goals, students need to attend and participate in classes. Attendance will be taken every class. You are allowed **two unexcused absences** no questions asked! Please email the professor before missing a class or, in the case of illness or emergency, as soon as possible after the absence. **Exceeding two unexcused absences will negatively affect the participation grade.** Please communicate with the professor! Stuff happens, and we can collaboratively find ways to succeed in the class. Tardiness disrupts class and will annoy your fellow classmates and instructor, so please come to class on time. If there's some extenuating circumstance that makes it difficult to arrive to class on time, please email ahead of time.

Participation can take a variety of forms. The easiest way to receive full participation credit is to come prepared and on time to class, take an active role in class discussion and activities, and be attentive. The classroom is a place where discussion is encouraged, where we share and learn from different viewpoints while remaining respectful of each other. Bigotry and discriminatory language will not be tolerated! If there are concerns about participation, please email your caring professor. :')

COURSE MATERIALS

There is no textbook for the course. Readings, scores, videos, and recordings will come from various sources. All readings are available as .pdfs on Blackboard or online at the listed website unless otherwise indicated. Students may use the techniques and technology of their choice. New tools will be introduced throughout the semester which students may choose to use.

HONOR CODE

Our Honor Code provides the foundation for the intellectual freedom that is encouraged and shared by all members of the academic community, and it embodies the belief that true academic freedom and discourse can only exist within a framework of honesty, integrity, and responsibility. With the privilege of attending Oberlin comes the responsibility of supporting both the expectations and the spirit of the Honor Code, which calls for submitting work of your own creation and giving proper credit to the ideas and work of others. This requires each

individual to respect all fellow members of the Oberlin College community and to vigorously support the protected nature of intellectual property. We emphasize personal responsibility and expect everyone will adopt, uphold, and adhere to the core values inherent to the Honor Code. As an example, professors do not proctor exams; rather, they trust students will follow the Honor Code. We encourage you to be accountable to other students and pledge to not cheat, plagiarize, fabricate, or falsify information, nor assist others in these actions.

ASSIGNMENTS & DEADLINES

There are six projects that apply different course concepts and engage your growing toolbox. Projects don't need to be particularly long (length and other requirements vary from project to project), but they need to demonstrate engagement with project goals through fully formed ideas. Assignments must be turned in on time for group listening and discussion sessions. However, life happens! **If you need an extension, please communicate your needs and we will figure it out.** Persistent lateness will impact your project and participation grades. See the schedule below for due dates and details about assigned reading, listening, watching, and other types of homework.

While sound is the primary domain of this course, students may choose to explore time-based media without sound or where sound is not the primary focus (ex: film, animation, body movement, etc) where appropriate. Projects do not need to result in a sound file but can instead take the shape of a system or a performance. Get in touch about your ideas!

★ PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS ★

Switch-On/Go Off – In the spirit of Wendy Carlos's 1968 hit record *Switched-On Bach* and the ensuing wave of imitators, choose a score from the music library and then create an all-electronic arrangement of that piece.

Electronic Decomposition – As a study, take apart a piece of electronic music composed before 1968, cut it up, sample it, edit it, and reassemble the scraps into a new work in whatever style you choose. Approach the project like a pseudo score study experiment to get deeper into the guts of a masterwork. Or take a different path ;)

Break Time – Make a sample-based beat! Many approaches, which will you choose? Crate dig to find the perfect break from an obscure 1970s country disco single, or make a drum kit from frog sounds, or take a knife to a vinyl record and record the noisy percussive skips, or... !

Ghost in the Machine Learning – Create a piece of music using only material generated using AI tools. Basic constraints: 1) make something you think sounds good and 2) show all your work!

Sounding Nostalgic – Sampling media! Create a composition that features the texture and affordances (the sound, the look, the behavior) of a particular medium. Play with hissy tape loops or the rich artifacts of ancient YouTube videos. Film grain, vinyl scratches, mp3 compression, oh my!

Radio Club Tech 350 – b2b with the whole class! Using music made in the previous five projects and other tracks, the class will collaborate on a mix using some basic DJing skills and smart curation.

GRADING

Attendance & Participation	40%
Assignments	60%

“How do I get an A?”- You enthusiastically and voluntarily contribute to class exercises with thoughtful comments and questions, arrive fully prepared for every class, respectfully interact with peers, demonstrate leadership in group activities, complete all assignments, satisfy project goals, show steady improvement with each assignment.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

R AUG 31 Syllabus Day // Introductions

WEEK 2

- T SEP 5 Wendy Carlos & Switching-On
READ/LISTEN: Heather Mease – “Gotta Switch-On to Go Off”
- R SEP 7 Electronic Orchestration // Library Fieldtrip!
LISTEN: choose an album by Isao Tomita

WEEK 3

- T SEP 12 Versioning // What Makes a Good Cover?
BRING: two versions of a piece of music to share in class.
- R SEP 14 Covers cont. // Work Time

WEEK 4

- T SEP 19 Project 1 Listening & Discussion
DUE: Project 1 – Switch On/Go Off
- R SEP 21 Decomposing and Recomposing
READ: Scott Haden Church – “The Gutenberg Parenthesis: Remix Throughout History”

WEEK 5

- T SEP 26 Approaches to Remix & Collage
READ: Marshall McLuhan – *The Medium is the Massage*
- R SEP 28 Remix & Collage cont. // Work Time
READ: Patricia Aufderheide – “Copyright and Fair Use in Remix”

WEEK 6

- T OCT 3 Project 2 Listening & Discussion
DUE: Project 2 – Electronic Decomposition
- R OCT 5 These are the Breaks
READ: Joseph Schloss – “It’s About Playing Records: History”
BRING: two contrasting percussive sounds to create a class drum kit

WEEK 7

- T OCT 10 Secret Santa Rhythm Roulette
PREPARE: We’re going on a short fieldtrip to the record store!

R OCT 12 Make Beats
READ: Kembrew McLeod – “An Oral History of Sampling: From Turntables to Mashups”

FALL BREAK Saturday, Oct 14 – Sunday, Oct 22

WEEK 8

T OCT 24 Make Beats // Work Time
R OCT 26 Project 3 Listening & Discussion
DUE: Project 3 – Break Time!

WEEK 9

T OCT 31 Uneasy Listening
READ: Yair Rubinstein – “Uneasy Listening: Towards a Hauntology of AI-Generated Music” and Mark Fisher – “What is Hauntology?”
R NOV 2 Tools and Possibilities
READ: Jaime Brookes – “The Last Recording Artist”
BRING: A piece of art made with AI (in part or entirely). Do a bit of research into the tools used.

WEEK 10

T NOV 7 Tools and Possibilities cont. // Work Time
R NOV 9 Project 4 Listening & Discussion
DUE: Project 4 – Ghost in the Machine Learning

WEEK 11

T NOV 14 Postmodernism, Pastiche, and Parody
READ: Frederic Jameson – “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”
WATCH: videogamedunkey – “Sonic Mania (dunkview)”
R NOV 16 The Grain of Media
READ: Maria Chavez – *Chance Procedures on Turntable*
LISTEN: Reynolds – Blank Tapes (2000)

WEEK 12

T NOV 21 A Pixelated Yesterday/Today/Tomorrow

READ: Ryan Maguire – “Ghost in the MP3” and Hito Steyerl – “In Defense of the Poor Image”

R NOV 23 **HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**

WEEK 13

T NOV 28 Project 5 Listening & Discussion

DUE: Project 5 – Sounding Nostalgic

R NOV 30 Let’s DJ! // Remix as Composition

READ: Bill Brewster & Frank Broughton – *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, “House”

WEEK 14

T DEC 5 Constructing a Mix // Internet Radio

READ: Terre Thaemlitz – “The Crisis of Post-Spectacle ‘Live’ Contemporary Ambient Performance (Or... Why I Can’t Get Paid to DJ A-Structural Audio)”

LISTEN: Choose one to explore - NTS, NOODS, Internet Public Radio, The Lot, or another internet station

R DEC 7 The Class Goes B2B - Spinning Tech 350

WEEK 15

T DEC 12 Finalize the Mix and **Complete Project 6 // LAST DAY OF CLASS**