Course Description and Procedures:

The seminar is conceived as a meeting place for identification, discovery, and discussion of issues salient to contemporary music practice. Each week we will explore a variety of perspectives from scholars and artists active in related fields. The weekly topics span a range of contemporary issues that, while organized in groups for convenience sake, are most appropriately envisioned as interrelated facets of a complex whole. The readings have been chosen to represent diverse perspectives and approaches to the topic, and, whenever possible, to highlight the work of influential scholars and artists. Individual articles are drawn from musicology, ethnomusicology, popular music studies, sociology, critical theory, feminist studies, postcolonial theory, new media criticism, and cultural, cognitive, and performance studies, but collectively they point to a post-disciplinary future for music studies (IMHO).

One student each week will serve as the “reviewer,” preparing a short synopsis of all of the readings that can be circulated to the class. While another student will serve as that week’s “respondent,” making certain to be well prepared to engage with the reviewer and to propel the discussion forward as needed. All students are encouraged to bring to each class a list of questions concerning the readings, a list of related contemporary artists (composers, improvisers, performers, new media practitioners, etc.) and any related audio or video examples they might wish to share in order to spur discussion.

In addition to regular attendance, a demonstrated familiarity with the readings, and active participation, a “publishable paper” of 10-15 double-spaced pages is required from each student. The paper should address in detail a complex of issues related to the course material. Participants are encouraged to use the seminar readings as sources but should also develop additional sources in consultation with the professor and on their own. The paper could be combined with a creative audio/video/performance work, but cannot be replaced by it. A prospectus for the paper is due during week 6, and the final paper, along with a short presentation followed by a question-and-answer session, is due during week 10.

Class Policy:

If a student misses a class for any reason (s)he will need to write detailed critical commentary on all of the assigned readings since (s)he will not be present at the discussion. In addition, any student missing more than two classes will need to retake the course in order to receive a passing grade.
WEEK 2: Defining/Contesting Experimentalism


WEEK 3: Inter-/Post-disciplinary Theory/Practice


Look over the contents of the above edited volumes to get a sense for the scope of the work and read an additional article and be prepared to summarize it to the class


WEEK 4: The Nature/Value of Music


Look over the following special issues and read at least one additional article in depth:

• Music Perception 23/1 (2005)
• Cognition 100 (2006)
• The World of Music 48/2 (2007)


Research the following books to get a sense for their scope and/or main argument:

• Music and the Mind by Anthony Storr (Ballantine Books, 1993)
• Music, the Brain, and Ecstasy: How Music Captures Our Imagination by Robert Jourdain (Harper Perennial, 1998)
• Music and Emotion: Theory and Research ed. by Patrick Juslin and John Sloboda (Oxford University Press, 2001)
• The Cognitive Neuroscience of Music (Oxford, 2003)
• Musical Communication edited by Dorothy Miell, Raymond MacDonald, David J. Hargreaves (Oxford, 2005)
• The Singing Neanderthals by Stephen Mithen (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005)
• This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession by Daniel Levitin (Dutton, 2006)
• Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation by David Huron (Bradford Books, 2006).
WEEK 5: Cognition/Corporeality/Identity


Look over the following three articles and read at least one of them in depth:


Look over the following special issues and read at least one additional article in depth:


WEEK 6: Technology/Ontology/Agency – (Paper Proposals Due)


WEEK 7: Technology/Creativity/Collectivity


WEEK 8: A Moment of Opportunity and Challenge


Look over the special issues of Contemporary Music Review (24/6, 2005) and Organised Sound (10/3, 2005) dedicated to Internet music and the edited book Audio Culture (Continuum 2005) and read one additional essay and be prepared to summarize it to the class.


WEEK 9: Student-suggested Readings

WEEK 10: Student Presentations – (Papers due)