Collective Composition
SYLLABUS

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Collective Composition is an ancient practice, so how do we approach it in the contemporary world? As we rediscover this process, what parts do we take from it?

In Collective Composition, we will explore the language of collaboration and how it differs from and mirrors the language of music. We will also weigh the role of individual practice within the collective. It is important for musicians and artists to feel that their specific traditions are taken seriously as we make something new together.

In this 12 week seminar, we will cultivate influences such as Cage/Cunningham; AACM and Black Experimentalism and The Theatrical Avant Garde. We will use these models to help build new work as an ensemble with multiple opportunities for leadership.

We will cultivate a community practice with the end goal of creating a shared language, terms of engagement and tools of measurement. We will spontaneously create the curriculum collectively.

The first half of class is discussion based on that week's assigned reading/viewing; the second half of class is embodied practice, implementing prompts and experiments of the artists' whose work we are learning about in the seminar. You will be offered specialized journal prompts every week that will help you monitor and track your internal shifts as you experience these new ways of working. They will serve as valuable touch points for you as you make your way through this seminar.

A link to view the detailed lesson plans of our weekly embodied practice can be found HERE

Intentions for this Semester:

THE SPACE AND BODY AS INSTRUMENTS

1. Make a safe space for the ensemble to take risks in.

2. Create opportunities to try a variety of roles within the collective: Initiator, amplifier, questioner, etc.
3. Explore undomesticated singing, soft animal body sounds and textures, to shape a new sound, feeling and way of being with our voices

BUILDING SKILLS

4. Nurture a capacity to build modularly and master pivots of building as an ensemble.
5. Gain facility with elasticity in form and learn to quickly reimagine and reshape structure collectively.

FINAL PROJECT

6. Each student takes the lead, curating a 12 min collective composition, with 9 singers/instrumentalists over the course of 12 weeks to be performed live during the final three weeks of class. You can find the Rubric here.

This Seminar will be divided into 4 modules:

I. PREPARING THE REHEARSAL ROOM
II. MODELS OF DEVISING
III. METHODS OF REFLECTION
IV. PERFORMANCE APPLICATIONS

A link to view the detailed lesson plans of our weekly embodied practice can be found HERE

About the Modules:

I. PREPARING THE REHEARSAL ROOM: Building skills to (classes 1-2)
   A. Create a Safe Space for Risk Taking
   B. Cultivate rituals of arrival
   C. Build terms of engagement
   D. Balance The Body and Mind
   E. Seek Creative Voice

II. MODELS OF DEVISING: Cultivating influences (classes 3-8)

A. Cage/Cunningham and the Black Mountain College
B. American Experimental Theater and the Theatrical Avant Garde
C. AACM and Black American Experimentalism
D. Generative Choreography, Dance Theater, Butoh
E. Creativity in the Recording Studio
F. Interdisciplinary Models and Devising Now

III. METHODS OF REFLECTION: Framework for talkbacks and feedback (class 9)
A. The Critical Feedback Method
B. “We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience”

V. PERFORMANCE APPLICATION (Classes 10-12)

REQUIREMENTS

Attendance
Attendance at all seminar meetings is required, with the exception of excused absences. Students facing difficulties due to illness or other extenuating circumstances should do their best to reach out to the seminar instructor in advance of any seminar they might not be able to attend in person. If you know that you’ll be missing more than two classes, plan to take the course at a different time/different semester.

Participation
Active participation in each week’s seminar discussion is strongly and warmly encouraged. A central aim of this seminar will be the development of a community of creative practice in which seminar discussions will be a forum for nurturing original ideas and fostering constructive, critical exchanges in a collaborative atmosphere.

Students will be the ensemble for their cohorts with shifting group leaders and will be expected to be engaged as both an ensemble member being guided and an ensemble member taking the lead.

Reflections
Written reflections on the week's resources in canvas are due prior to that week's class.

Final Project
Each student will be given 45 minutes of in class rehearsal time to lead the ensemble of 8 students plus yourself in the spontaneous creation of a composition as well as guide a group reflection on that composition. A full rubric can be found HERE.

Paper
Each student will be required to write a paper reflecting on their final project performance. The paper will be broken into two parts:

- Preparing for the performance
    - Turned in prior to the performance (week 7)
    - Establish the rules of engagements
    - Explain the influences on their performance, based on required texts, films, and audio
- Methods of reflection (reflection on the influences of the piece, watching the recording of the performance piece)

GRADING

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Participation: 20%
Paper: 20%
Reflections: 10%
Final project: 50%

SCHEDULE

I. PREPARING THE REHEARSAL ROOM: Creating a language, terms of engagement and tools of measurement

WEEK ONE
Introduction to the seminar

1. Create a safe space for risk taking
2. Cultivate rituals of arrival
3. Build terms of engagement

Reading
Required

- Will Davis, "Queering the Room, Some Beginning Notions for a Queer Directing Practice"
- John Cage, "Ten Rules for Students and Teachers"

Viewing
Required

- Peter Sellars, Freedom From Fear

Recommended

- David Reed, Improvise for Real, P. 1 "Why We Play"
- David Reed, Improvise for Real, P. 2 "The Power of Direct Experience"

II. MODELS OF DEVISING

WEEK TWO
Balance the Body and Mind & Seek Creative Voice
Fides Krucker, Grotowski, Peter Sellars, Andrei Tarkovsky, Victor Wooten

Reading
Required

- Fides Krucker, "Reclaiming Calliope: Freeing the female voice through undomesticated singing" (2022) (Selection)
- Will Johnson, "Time Present and Change" and "Surrender" from Balance of Body and Mind (Selections)
- Andrei Tarkovsky "Art, a yearning for the ideal" from "Sculpting in Time" (Selection)
- Victor Wooten, "Notes" from The Music Lesson (Selection)

Viewing
Required

- Peter Sellars, Dream Talk
- Victor Wooten, "Music as a language" ~ 5 min

Reflection
Required

- **Journal Prompt:** Reflect on the experience of your solo production music making practice. What has been powerful about your individual practice? Do you feel individual practice is ultimately in service to collaborative experiences? Do you feel you can access the same level of creativity and art making in your solo practice as you can in collaborative collectives? What are the physical components of your music making practice as it stands now?

Recommended

- Grotowski, "Actor's Training" (Toward A Poor Theatre)
- Poor Unfortunate Theater: Crash Course Theater #48
- Training at Grotowski's "Laboratorium" in Wrozlaw in 1972 Screener

WEEK THREE
Black Mountain College
John Cage and Merce Cunningham

Reading
Required

- Helen Molesworth, Leep Before you Look: Black Mountain College 1933-1957 (2015) (selection)

Viewing
Required

- Cunningham: Traces legendary American choreographer Merce Cunningham's artistic evolution from his early years in postwar New York to his emergence as one of the world's most visionary choreographers. A breathtaking explosion of dance, music.

Reflection
Required

- **Journal Prompt:** What musical/pedagogical philosophies were strong in your own upbringing? What kind of musical environments raised you and how did the practices and models of those environments shape your thinking about what an ensemble is? What a concert is? What composing is? If you were to create your

own music school today, what would be some of the pillars of musical philosophy and pedagogy that you would instill in the framework of that school?

Recommended:

- "Fully Awake: Black Mountain College"
  A Documentary by Neeley Dawson and Cathryn Davis Zommer
- Cage/Cunningham
  Cage/Cunningham documents the fifty year collaboration between two revolutionary American artists, composer John Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham.
- John Cage, Journeys in Sound
  A film by Allan Miller and Paul Smaczny

WEEK FOUR
American Experimental Theater and the Theatrical Avant Garde
Anne Bogart, Peter Brook, Heiner Goebbels

Reading
Required

- Anne Bogart, A Director Prepares (Selection) “Resistance”
- Anne Bogart, “Introducing Composition” from The Viewpoints Book (Selection)
- Peter Brook, The Open Door (Selection)

Viewing
Required

- Heiner Goebbels and Gelsey Bell, Artist Talk: Everything that happened and would happen
- Peter Brook: The Tightrope - Educational Trailer
- Peter Brook's The Empty Space (1973) - Excerpt

Reflection
Required

- **Journal Prompt:** Where and how often in your practice do you experience resistance, lulls, boredom and what is your current method of attending to those blocks? What, if any, methods from the avant garde theater tradition do you feel called to fold into your own musical practice? How important is a physical warm up to your current musical practice? If you have a physical warm up, what does it

entail? Do you include collaborators in your warm up? If you could map out a collective warm up for your dream ensemble, what would it entail/look like?

Recommended:

- Pauline Oliveros, "Sonic Meditations"
- Peter Brook, "Meetings with Remarkable Men" An Interview

WEEK FIVE
AACM and Black American Experimentalism
Wadada Leo Smith, Anthony Braxton, Muhal Richard Abrams, Sun Ra

Reading
Required

- George Lewis, "A Power Stronger Than Itself" (Selection)
- "The Sun Ra Centenary" The New Yorker, Richard Brady
- Vijay Iyer and Muhal Richard Abrams, Sounding Together- Collaborative Perspectives on U.S. Music in the 21st Century

Viewing
Required

- Wadada Leo Smith | AFA Artist Talks Wadada Leo Smith shares his philosophy on music, leadership and successful collective models, education, and more in this interview for AFA Artist Talks.
- Anthony Braxton - North Sea Jazz 1997

Reflection
Required

- **Journal Prompt**: What have been the challenges you have faced in leading an ensemble or being a member in an ensemble? Recall an example of a time you observed someone solve a conflict in an ensemble with grace (could be you!) What ideas of musical leadership, from the artists in this module, have made the biggest impact on you? What are three pillars of your own model of musical leadership?

Recommended:

- Sun Ra Documentary

- Sun Ra Arkestra's 99-year-old director says musical inspiration keeps him energized
- Beginner's Guide to Anthony Braxton

WEEK SIX:
Generative Choreography, Dance Theater, Butoh
Jonathan Burrows, Pina Bausch, Kazuo Ohno

Reading
Required
- Jonathan Burrows, A Choreographer's Handbook (Selection)

Viewing
Required
- Wim Wenders, "Pina"(film)
- Message from Pina Bausch - The 2007 Kyoto Prize
- Pina Bausch interview on Arts.21
- Kazuo Ohno - My mother (1998)
- A butoh documentary: Kamaitachi in the snow

Reflection
Required
- **Journal Prompt:** As you reflect on your own practice can you see ways in which you limit yourself to "acceptable" sounds and movements? If you knew that no one would reject you, are there extremes of your sound and visual world that you would explore? Can you describe these curiosities? Do any of the artists from this week's module embody freedoms you yearn to have in your practice? If so, which ones?

Recommended:
- Butoh - Piercing the Mask: Abandonment of the Self
- Gadu Doushin, "What is Butoh?"
- Fighting rhythm with Butoh - Deeply Human, BBC World Service
- Twyla Tharpe, The Creative Habit
- Pina Bausch "What Moves Me"

WEEK SEVEN:
Creativity in the Recording Studio
Shahzad Ismaily, Rick Rubin, Sawn Everett, George Martin, Sylvia Massy

Reading
Required

- Rick Rubin, "The Creative Act: A Way of Being" (Selection)

Viewing
Required

- Shahzad Ismaily | An interview with Ceramic Dog's bassist and Figure 8 Recording Studio's owner
- The Beatles, "Something" Rehearsal Clip
- George Martin About Beatles Studio Sessions
- Sylvia Massy: Unconventional Recording
- Sylvia Massy: Creative Approaches to Recording and Producing Music ~2 min

Recommended:

- Shawn Everett - How To Produce Music Like A Painter
- Shawn Everett - Visual Mixing: Tips
- George Martin - In My Life (1998)
- Sylvia Massy (Studio Divine)_Show Us Your Junk! Ep. 25 | EarthQuaker Devices

Reflection
Required

- **Journal Prompt:** What is the role of recorded music in your practice? What has been your experience in recording studios? Are you comfortable with in them and what are you uncomfortable with in them? Can you remember a particularly excellent recording session that you were a part of? What made it so memorable? What is your archival process generally for your music/work?

Recommended:

- Shahzad Ismaily & Stanford Cheung- Where We Won't Be Found

WEEK EIGHT
Interdisciplinary Models and Devising Now
Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti, Eddy Kwon, Tyshawn Sorey

Reading
Required

- Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti, Embodiment in practice: the power of a transformative in-between
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Viewing
Required

- Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti, Talks Session 6: Mutant Myths Worlds
- Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti, Behind the scenes at Eros: interview Boukje and Ibelisse
- Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti, SILVERBONES - PLACE TO LAND
- eddy kwon, Isabel Crespo Pardo, Zekkereya El-magharbel, Lesley Mok, tombstar
- Tyshawn Sorey - Full Performance, Conduction at Banff Centre 54~ minutes
- "Tyshawn Sorey: You're either creating or your not" 2~ minutes
- Tyshawn Sorey and Do Yeon Kim | Improvisation: Duo 12~ minutes

Reflection
Required

- **Journal Prompt:** Which aspects of this week's artist's works most affected you? Did you find the elements of endurance in these artists' works challenging your own aesthetic either as an observer or a creator? In what ways does your current framework of Performer/Audience/Composer relationship fall short in supporting your community/the community you hope to create around you?

Recommended:

- Eddy Kwon: UMMA-YA
- Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti, Paper Ensemble

II. METHODS OF REFLECTION

WEEK NINE
“We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience”
Liz Lerman, John Dewey

Reading
Required
- “The Critical Feedback Method”, Liz Lerman
- “Reflection In Experience” from Democracy and Education by John Dewey

Viewing
Required
- Liz Lerman, Introduction to CRP and its Four Steps
- John Dewey, John Dewey’s 4 Principles of Education

Reflection
Required
- **Journal Prompt:** How did the collaborative experience in these different modalities of collective composition shift your art making practice? Which aspect of the work had a stronger effect on you, the embodied practice/interoception, the reflective prompts and practices or the readings and viewings of the work of the presented artists?

Recommended:
- *Please use this time to make progress on your paper and schedule a 1:1 zoom session with me to assist you in that process*

WEEK TEN
IN CLASS PERFORMANCES

Viewing
Required
- Please watch the recordings of your ensemble works filmed in class

Reflection

Required

- Write a reflection on your experience and post mortem with your ensemble pieces from class

Recommended:

- *Please use this time to make progress on your paper and schedule a 1:1 zoom session with me to assist you in that process*

WEEK ELEVEN
IN CLASS PERFORMANCES

Viewing
Required

- Watch your ensemble pieces from class

Reflection
Required

- Write a reflection on your experience and post mortem with your ensemble pieces from class

Recommended:

- *Please use this time to make progress on your paper and schedule a 1:1 zoom session with me to assist you in that process*

WEEK TWELVE
IN CLASS PERFORMANCES

Viewing
Required

- Watch your ensemble pieces from class

Reflection

Required

- Write a reflection on your experience and post mortem with your ensemble pieces from class

BOOKS AND OTHER READING AND VIEWING MATERIALS

"Fully Awake: Black Mountain College"
A Documentary by Neeley Dawson and Cathryn Davis Zommer

Cage/Cunningham
Cage/Cunningham documents the fifty year collaboration between two revolutionary American artists, composer John Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham.

John Cage, Journeys in Sound
A film by Allan Miller and Paul Smaczny

A Choreographer's Handbook, Jonathan Burrows

Reclaiming Calliope, Fides Krucker

“The Creative Act: A Way of Being”, Rick Rubin

The Viewpoints Book, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau

Critical Response Process, Liz Lerman

A Power Stronger Than Itself, George E Lewis