Using Blogs for Better Student Writing Outcomes

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In her March 2012 *Washington Post* column, "I Dare You Not to Cry: On Classical Music and Critical Thinking," music critic Anne Midgette noted how difficult it is for otherwise art-savvy, educated people to write about music. The inspiration for her column was a *New York Times* review of the Whitney Biennial in New York. One sentence of the review stood out for Midgette. The reviewer described Werner Herzog's multimedia installation piece, "Hearsay of the Soul," as a "ravishing five-screen digital projection," which is an "unexpected celebration of the handmade by the technological." The work is a collage of magnified close-ups of landscape etchings by the Dutch artist Hercules Segers set to music, primarily by the Dutch cellist and composer Ernst Reijseger, who, according to the reviewer, "also appears briefly on screen, playing his heart out. *I dare you not to cry.*" (Emphasis is Midgette's.) In reaction to the review, Midgette wrote,

> In the middle of this sophisticated appreciation of contemporary art comes this throwaway line implying that seeing a classical musician at work, "playing his heart out" (classical music always leads, it seems, to clichés), is something so moving and genuine that it will evoke tears. And this kind of naïve, heartfelt statement falls right into the "gosh, ain't these talented folks grand" school of classical music appreciation that my own work as a critic has largely been about trying to get beyond.[1]

Midgette's task as a critic shares similarities with our task as music history educators, and the *New York Times* reviewer's difficulty in articulating how this music functioned in the multimedia collage is the same difficulty our students have in writing about music. I find that my music students may be passionate about works or performances, but often do not have the skills to communicate their musical insights.

1. Anne Midgette, "I Dare You Not to Cry: On Classical Music and Critical Thinking," *Washington Post,* March 2, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/classical-beat/post/i-dare-you-not-to-cry-on-classical-music-and-critical-thinking/2012/03/02/gIQAcYVwmR_blog.html.

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As music history pedagogues we are perpetually encouraging better analytical and critical thinking skills and better writing outcomes—we want students to be able to not only identify, classify, and label specific musical phenomena, but to also appraise, differentiate, evaluate, and argue effectively about music. An "outcomes based" educational philosophy stresses what students should be able to *do* as a result of their classroom experiences. We are increasingly mandated to emphasize the synthesis and organization of ideas, information, and experiences in new ways.[2] At the same time, I find it equally important to demonstrate to the students that the arts are not a cult, nor an esoteric experience for privileged devotees, but that art is a service to men and women living a shared life, a means of attaining community goals and creating a rich identity and common experience. With these goals in mind, I found that requiring the students to write in their own public online blog was one way to promote better writing and analysis, in which students publicly connected a traditionally esoteric arts practice with a broader community and with their own experiences. For the reader who may not be interested in blogging, or who may even be distrustful of the blog as a platform for communication, please keep in mind that the blog is just a tool—like any writing technology—and that the writing research presented in the rest of this paper can inform any type of writing. However, blogging does afford special opportunities for the writer, reader, and classroom that cannot be achieved through traditional writing assignments.

Following a brief review of the use electronic media in music history teaching, this essay describes a blogging assignment used as part of an elective music course for undergraduate and graduate music majors at Ithaca College called The American Avant Garde. Blogging is a twenty-first century skill which can be used effectively to serve very traditional educational goals—better writing and analysis. What I discovered, however, was that the blogging exercise accomplished so much more: it not only promoted better writing outcomes, but a specific kind of thinking process—what Bloom's taxonomy advocates would call "higher order thinking skills." It also increased student engagement and encouraged regular writing habits by shifting the audience from the traditional audience of one (the professor) to a potential audience of peers and strangers. The nature of the assignment also forced the students to address time and work load management issues. The essay concludes with a discussion of two important challenges to using blogs in the classroom: how to evaluate writing in blogs as compared to writing a traditional term paper, and how to objectively grade and evaluate blogs.

2. See for example, *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Requirements of Affiliation and Standards for Accreditation* (Philadelphia: Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006, rev. 2011), http://www.msche.org/publications/CHX-2011-WEB.pdf.

Brief Literature Review

In a previous issue of *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, Mark Clague and José Antonio Bowen discussed how new technologies can be extensions of old pedagogical tools. For example, Clague created a listening blog that "linked streaming audio examples to descriptive web pages while inviting students to post their reactions to music."[3] In the same volume, José Antonio Bowen proposed that the best use of technology is outside of the classroom, where it can function as a tool in facilitating student preparedness. Bowen urged teachers to "teach naked"; that is, to meet students face-to-face without technology in the classroom in order to focus on class discussion and collaborative projects. Bowen argued,

> If you stop spending class time providing facts to your students you will have all of that class time for problem solving, evaluating, synthesizing, developing real world context, reflecting on the significance of the material, engaging in active learning, applying what you know to new context, enhancing intellectual curiosity, improving writing, and teaching critical thinking.[4]

Both Clague and Bowen use well-established technological tools to target fairly traditional learning outcomes. At the same time, the use of online tools gives both the student and professor a reinvigorated connection to the curriculum while stressing technological proficiency. Clague pointed out that publishing student work on the web, "is not simply cool and hip, but an essential skill of twenty-first century literacy."[5] As pedagogues, however, we are typically not as concerned with our students' technological literacy as we are their traditional reading and writing skills.

Blogging in Theory and Practice

During the spring semester of 2012, I taught an elective music course for undergraduate and graduate music majors at Ithaca College called The American Avant Garde. There were twelve graduate students and six undergraduates in the class. The course covered avant garde and experimental music in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, starting with Charles Ives and ending with William Duckworth. I decided to have the students struggle with the

3. Mark Clague, "Publishing Student Work on the Web: The *Living✪Music Project* and the Imperatives of the New Literacy," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 63, http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/48/81.

4. José Antonio Bowen, "Rethinking Technology Outside the Classroom," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 47, http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/47/69.

5. Clague, "Publishing Student Work on the Web," 62.

challenge of writing about music on a regular basis by having the students blog before every class period. The blog assignment was intentionally broad:

> You are expected to maintain a blog that reflects criticism of all of the reading and listening assignments. I encourage you to express yourself through the blog and to create a positive web presence. Your blogs are due at midnight on Mondays and Wednesdays. This allows me time to review the blogs and to highlight especially interesting discussion material.[6]

While the blog assignment was loosely defined, i.e. "blog about the listening and reading assignments," I did occasionally give the students a more specific prompt. The results of the blog exercise were impressive. The most prolific writer in the class wrote the equivalent of seventy-five pages of text (double-spaced, 12-pt, Times New Roman) not counting the numerous illustrations, links, and video embedded in the writing. The least prolific student still wrote over the course of the semester the equivalent of forty pages, richly illustrated with multimedia.

The assignment was designed not only to get the students writing, but also to get them to think critically about music and to communicate these thoughts to a broader audience. The goal of my institution's integrated core curriculum is likely similar to the goals of most higher education institutions across the country. Our hope is to produce graduates who can:

> 1. address a topic, issue, problem area, or human challenge using a combination of concepts, theories, and/or methods from multiple perspectives or fields of study,
> 2. apply concepts, theories, methods, or skills to analyze new questions or complex problems, and
> 3. engage in and communicate self-reflection about their learning in the Integrative Core Curriculum, their chosen major discipline, and their overall [. . .] College experience.[7]

The blogging platform is ideally suited for approaching a subject of study from multiple perspectives, and when used well, writers can easily incorporate combinations of concepts, theories, methods, as well as modes of communication in their work. The flexibility of the medium does not, however,

6. The American Avant Garde, syllabus appears in Appendix A. The phrase "positive web presence" has become a buzzword of sorts lately, and there are a number of "how to" resources on the web that guide students through putting forward a professional profile online. See for example, Environmental Careers Organization Canada, "Putting a Face to a Name: Creating a Positive Web Presence and Personality," http://www.eco.ca/community/blog/putting-a-face-to-a-name-creating-a-positive-web-presence-and-personality/47149/ and, Finding Dulcinea, "Building an Online Presence More Important Than Ever," http://www.findingdulcinea.com/ news/education/2010/march Building-an-Online-Presence-More-Important-Than-Ever.html.

7. Ithaca College, "What is Integrative Learning?" http://www.ithaca.edu/icc/what_is_it/.

preclude depth of analysis or complexity. Blogging also provides a medium for a valuable reflective practice, although this reflection was never prescribed in any assignment. The blog deadline and format required the students to read the assignment on time, and insured that the reading was careful and close—close enough to be able to discuss the materials in a thoughtful manner on the blog. Perhaps the conscientious student could have experienced the same benefits from journaling privately, but as blogs are immediately accessible, the deadlines and writing requirements were firm and content from the students' blogs was woven in to the next class period. The public nature of the blog also gave the students an extra incentive to write well. I found a number of outcomes from the semester of blogging that can be divided roughly into four categories: (1) writing, (2) higher order thinking skills (such as application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation), (3) engagement, and (4) life skills.[8]

Writing

The blog format and the nature of the assignment required the students to write regularly and to write about 700 words each time they blogged. They also read book chapters, scholarly articles, and other primary source material, and listened to a number of pieces—all of which served as inspiration for the blog assignment. The sheer volume of writing was certainly good practice, but the time constraints drove a particular kind of writing process. Not one student created an outline before drafting their blog essay. While we most commonly urge an "outline first" strategy, especially when writing research papers, the blog writing was similar to what we would consider "freewriting," although in strict freewriting, the writer does not edit and often writes for a predetermined block of time only. Peter Elbow, author of *Writing Without Teachers,* famously critiqued the "outline first" strategy:

> This idea of writing is backwards. That's why it causes so much trouble. Instead of a two-step transaction of meaning-into-language, think of writing as an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning—before you know your meaning at all—and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve. Only at the end will you know what you want to say or the words you say it with.[9]

8. The concept of higher order thinking skills is associated with Bloom's taxonomy of educational objective. Bloom identified six levels within his taxonomy: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The top three are the higher order thinking skills and are important components of critical thinking. See for example this application of Bloom's taxonomy to digital media: Educational Origami, "Bloom's Digital Taxonomy," http://edorigami.wikispaces.com/Bloom%27s+Digital+Taxonomy. See also Robert C. Lagueux, "Inverting Bloom's Taxonomy: The Role of Affective Responses in Teaching and Learning," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 3, no. 2 (2013): 119–50, http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/76/118.

9. Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 15.

Writing pedagogy research has supported the claim that the writing process is not just "putting down of ideas already held," but rather, "creating ideas during the process of writing."[10] Elbow claims that writing complete sentences from the very start decreases writer's block, but also produces "bits of writing that are genuinely *better* than usual: less random, more coherent, more highly organized."[11] Note that only *bits* of writing are better than usual. All writing requires editing, but by delaying the editing process until very late, the writer is able to explore the topic in a natural voice. Elbow asserts, "The habit of compulsive, premature editing doesn't just make writing hard. It also makes writing dead. Your voice is damped out by all the interruptions, changes, and hesitations between the consciousness and the page."[12] While the writing process students employed for their blogs is not what an English professor would consider strict freewriting, blog writing resembles freewriting in that both strategies foreground a particular *thinking* process over a particular *writing* process. Students corrected their writing as they wrote (on both a small and large scale) and they were not limited by a time limit. However, because of the frequent due dates and the sheer amount of material due, the students did not have the luxury of careful research, note taking, outlining, and revision.

As professors we also understand that the solution to better writing isn't just more writing, but more *reading*. There is ample research on this correlation in young children, but the literature on this relationship with college students is scarce. Curriculum development specialist Dr. William Bintz designed a study to test if freewriting or similar open writing might be an efficacious tool for measuring reading comprehension in graduate students. Bintz proposed that "freewriting not only supported continuous and unedited writing but also encouraged and supported continuous and unedited personal responses to text." This seems obvious. But Bintz also suggested that freewriting created an opportunity "to identify, understand, and come to appreciate the personal stances readers take on text, as well as the personal meanings readers construct from text." Bintz's test subjects demonstrated reading comprehension by paraphrasing content in their freewriting, but, more importantly, Blintz showed that the exercise of freewriting enabled his readers "to better understand what they currently know, how they came to know it, and why they continue to believe it." The way in which the students

10. Charles MacArthur, Steve Graham, and Jill Fitzgerald, eds., *Handbook of Writing Research* (New York: Guilford Press, 2006), 32.

11. Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers,* 8.

12. Ibid., 6. Other researchers make similar claims that freewriting leads to better writing of all sorts. See Joy Marsella and Thomas Hilgers, "Exploring the Potential of Freewriting," in *Nothing Begins with N: New Investigations of Freewriting* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 93–110.

communicated this understanding, according to Bintz, was by employing a number of "voices" in their writing—the voice of the author, their own voice, and the voice of the professor. Freewriting enabled readers to synthesize content from these various "voices" and allowed them to "take a stance . . . generate questions, construct anomalies, and consider alternatives that actually put their current knowledge to the test." The students were actively expanding comprehension skills as he observed them taking specific positions, shifting positions, and taking new stances as they wrote with their own voices and reflected on the voices of others.[13]

Example 1 is an excerpt from a graduate student's blog reacting to the chapter on "New Romanticism" from Kyle Gann's book, *American Music in the Twentieth Century*[14] and the listening assignment that included George Rochberg's *Bagatelles for Piano, Short Sonatas,* and String Quartet No. 3; George Crumb's *Black Angels;* John Adams's *Grand Pianola Music;* and Frederic Rzewski's *Coming Together,* and *People United Will Never be Defeated!*

Example 1: A graduate student blog on Kyle Gann, "New Romanticism" in *American Music in the Twentieth Century*.

> Thou foster-child of Silence
>
> John Keats stated at the conclusion of his *Ode on a Grecian Urn* a line which has become so ubiquitous as to border on the cliché: "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty," and the final assertion that
>
> > . . . —that is all
> > Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'
>
> Gann often alluded to the (admittedly motley) crew of composers in his chapter as those who somehow rediscovered beauty—and one has to admit that while the music of most of these composers would be considered less thorny, dissonant, jarring or intellectual than that of the past, the use of 'beauty' as the ideal is completely subjective. I don't want to get hung up on an exploration of the limits or function of the term 'beauty,' just noting it as a little flag . . . not a red flag even, but somewhere in the orange family. You know, some beautiful color. Oops.
>
> While reading Gann's chapter I started thinking about Keats's poem, and while listening to the wildly divergent music, I decided I had to re-read it. I found a number of lines, not just the last, which seem applicable here—if

13. William Bintz, "Using Freewriting To Assess Reading Comprehension," *Reading Horizons* 40, no. 3 (2000): 210, 218.

14. Kyle Gann, "New Tonality 1—The New Romanticism," in *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 218–52.

> one were so inclined in fact, I think one could make a veritable Don McLean out of Keats, especially as this poem can refer to this particular moment in music history (and present as it were). But here are some highlights:
>
> Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter
>
> I was taken by the tale of Rochberg's conversion to more traditional and accessible forms and sonorities in music; it was like a religious experience. Whether or not aesthetics has anything to do with it, or whether an artist's inspiration and motivation become agents of the world in which s/he lives, most of the 'great' composers from the common practice era and before (and some after) claimed either divine inspiration or motivation in their works. That's not to say that the serialists were heathen bastards, but it does speak a bit to Rochberg (and others, including Bernstein) shuffling off more 'avant garde' styles for the music within them—the unheard melodies—which had to emerge.
>
> Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
> Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
>
> Detractors of this 'new romanticism' decry its recycling of old dusty tones used by many before—though, every spring the same trees become alive with the same leaves, and every year it is celebrated. Composers should be lucky to have that perennial staying power.
>
> Thou, silent form! dost tease us out of thought
> As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
>
> Composers can and should write whatever they wish, and then seek an audience for their honest work. Honesty and integrity dictate that a composer should not bend the work of their minds and hearts to some other form, yet humanity and decency require that they do not attempt to bend an audience to their Cold Pastoral. I once wrote a jab against theorists which can apply in a great degree to the Babbitt-class of composers:
>
> "A theorist can make you respect a piece you hate, and drive you to hate a piece you love."
>
> Actually, the aforementioned composer class only asks your respect and never your love (in pseudo Machiavellian style), and must simultaneously destroy (or cause to be unloved) the love-deserving or love-requesting piece.[15]

The writing example above is certainly not formal, but the conversational quality suits the nature of the content, which is reflective and insightful. The

15. All blog excerpts used with the permission of the authors. The blog excerpts have not been edited.

excerpt crafts specific arguments within the short piece, using the lines from Keats as an interesting analog to the musical materials. A more formal writing assignment may not have been the appropriate format for the Keats quotation, but here it is quite charming. The student has clearly read carefully and closely, and listened attentively. More interesting, perhaps, is how this example demonstrates Bintz's experience of his students employing multiple "voices" in their writing. Note that the very first voice in the blog excerpt above is Keats'. The student then follows with Gann's voice, referencing the reading assignment specifically. The passage about the word "beauty" raising a little flag is a nod to an earlier reading assignment by Arthur Danto, "The Abuse of Beauty."[16] The voices of the composers appear in the writing, and the voice of the student strides forth at the end as he quotes his own writing.

Not all of the writing for the class was this eloquent or insightful. Freewriting, like any sophisticated skill, must be learned and practiced, and it can be very difficult at times.[17] Freewriting does not necessarily nor consistently produce rich insight and analysis. While blogging may be a more comfortable format for the students—like writing in your favorite slippers at home instead of putting on your suit and going to the office—it is not always the most productive. Consider the following **Example 2**:

Example 2: Graduate student freewriting example on Rzewski's inclusion among other "New Romanticists."

> A few years ago my Wind Symphony played John Adams Lollapalooza. At the time, I didn't like it. Now, I still don't like it. It starts off pretty cool, with a fun bass line, but soon it gets out of control. So many things are happening at once! In the middle it gets interesting again, but overall it's definitely not my favorite music to listen to, or play. The Director of Bands at the time, at the school where I did my undergrad, Eastern Michigan University, labeled John Adams as the best composer of time. I just can not agree. With a lot of the music we've listened to in this class, I've been able to see it from a different perspective and I've actually liked a lot more things or at least had respect for them. There's just something about this music that makes me uncomfortable. As I was listening to his Grand Pianola Music, again there were times I really liked his music. The quotes he took from Charles Ives Concord Sonata, the Alcotts, was great. I love Charles Ives, I think that's why I liked it so much. But that only last so long, then billions of other things start to happen in the background, the woodwinds are in the back freaking out with fast high notes while the brass is playing a super loud low theme . . . There is just so much!

16. Arthur Danto, "The Abuse of Beauty," *Daedalus* 131 (Fall 2012): 35–56.

17. Hannah Rule asserts that freewriting practices of all sorts require "training, conversation, and reorientation" in "The Difficulties of Thinking Through Freewriting" *Composition Forum* 27, (Spring 2013), http://compositionforum.com/issue/27/freewriting.php.

> When I started George Crumb's Black Angels I think I actually jumped. This is the type of music you would here playing while you were trick-or-treating as a child. Creepy is really the best way I can describe it. The instruments really remind me of insects as well, I can just here them scurrying around. Ick, I hate bugs. But really, I think when I own a house in the future and I start to pass out candy to children on Halloween I will definitely play this piece. That'll scare the kids! Maybe I'll even have a haunted house! Okay enough about Halloween. I believe we're listening to this piece again today in class as a guided listening, I can't say that I look forward to it.
>
> As for Rzewski, I'd never even heard of him. My first impression of his The People United will Never Be Defeated! was not a bad one. I'm kind of surprised he is linked under the same category as the two other composers I've talked about so far. As I listen more, I GUESS I can KIND OF see similarities. It's a bit random at times, but not nearly to the extent of the others. I kind of liked this piece.
>
> Coming together greatly reminded me of Jacob ter Veldhuis. The voice speaking over the music was so similar
>
> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NO9UbZL0cP8&feature=related

It is clear that the example above was rushed. The writing is sidetracked by the idea that *Black Angels* is creepy and the paragraph that follows is not useful. As with the previous excellent example, this student has a number of "voices" resonating in her writing, but the voices are limited and do not add a good deal of detail or insight. The student combines her own performance history and past educational experiences with this encounter with new music. The important voice that is missing from the conversation is the voice of the author of the reading assignment. It is clear that while the student did listen to the assigned pieces, she did not complete the reading assignment. The question of Rzewski's inclusion among other "New Romanticists" is answered in Gann's chapter. The reader is also left wanting much more depth of analysis. Phrases such as "There's just something about this music that makes me uncomfortable," and "I GUESS I can KIND OF see similarities," should have been followed up with more reflection. She does include a link to demonstrate an insightful connection between Rzewski and Jacob ter Veldhuis, but needed to analyze the musical connections, not just the textual similarities. Even within the loose structure, her personal reflection needs much more detail, and in a case like this, class discussion provided an excellent opportunity to push for deeper analysis of the materials.

Higher Order Thinking Skills (Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation)

I would like to return to the claim made above that the writing process is more than just putting down words, but is actually a process of discovery. This

was sometimes overtly stated in the student's work. **Example 3** was written in response to the aesthetics article by Danto briefly alluded to above:

Example 3: Undergraduate student blog post demonstrating writing as discovery.

> A few posts ago, I expressed my feeling that one of the goals of the avant garde movement was to expose the beauty of things that are not traditionally considered beautiful. I quoted Cage, and shared his sentiment that there is no reason to consider something to be not beautiful.
>
> I think if Danto had read that post, he would have laughed in my face.
>
> And, after reading his compelling argument, I must admit my stance has been shaken. (And my trust in the words of John Cage shaken? How could this be!?!?!) Admittedly, having just completed reading his article, my head is spinning. I do not say this as a negative comment. However, I do say it to be totally up front, and confess that this post represents my current mental state: one of confusion and unorganized thoughts about the possibilities and implications of beauty, art, and philosophy. Therefore, the writings that follow are mostly me trying to work out my thoughts in words, thoughts which I'm sure will continue to change as soon as a hit the "publish" button.
>
> That being said, here it goes . . . [. . . .]

The writing here is very conversational, but the insight into the student's process is valuable. We can follow his thought process as he works out what he already knew (or thought he knew) about new music aesthetics and this encounter with the reading assignment. Researchers have studied this phenomenon in studies of freewriting. While traditional writing strategies (gathering notes, making an outline, etc.) created better final drafts, writers who started their process by writing complete sentences produced *better ideas*.[18] We can see how the post above would benefit from editing, but I'm not sure the student would have been as insightful with the analysis that followed the excerpt above had the assignment been to turn in a physical paper.

18. MacArthur, et. al., *Handbook of Writing Research,* 35. Studies abound that freewriting increases critical and creative thinking. See for example Lynn Hammond, "Using Focused Freewriting to Promote Critical Thinking," in *Nothing Begins with N: New Investigations of Freewriting* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 71–92; and James Sheridan, "Skipping on the Brink of the Abyss: Teaching Thinking through Writing," *New Directions for Community Colleges* 77 (Spring 1992): 51–61. Michael Carter argues that this development of writing as a particular way of knowing and understanding is discipline specific and needs to be taught within the student's area of study. See Michael Carter, "Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines," *College Composition and Communication* 58, no. 3 (2007): 385–418.

In addition to working out a different kind of thought processes through the writing, the students also enriched their understand of the materials by embedding different media in the blog. The best professional bloggers take advantage of the ability to link their writing to the work of others on the web and to illustrate their writing with visual images, video, and audio examples. Because of the nature of the medium, students consistently connected specific musical practices with other arts: poetry, popular music, visual art and sculpture, and even popular entertainment forms such as the feature film and television. This kind of genre-crossing behavior was particularly appropriate in a study of the avant garde, and these juxtapositions were enlightening. One student illustrated her discussion of minimalism with illustrations of Richard Serra sculptures and large-scale paintings by Sol LeWitt. In her blog (**Example 4**), she wrote:

Example 4: Graduate student blog post on minimalism.

> I ended up spending a long time perusing images of Serra and LeWitt simply because these visual images seem so appealing, so clean, so fresh . . . I can understand why the term "minimalism" has seemed inadequate to composers. Visual repetition often appears organic, balanced, cohesive, and ordered; hearing a sonic version of repetition that is phased, or seemingly "out of sync," becomes mesmerizing, psychedelic, entrancing, time altering.

The juxtaposition of minimalist visual art examples and musical minimalism offered opportunities for differentiation and discrimination between the two styles (analysis) as well as an opportunity to argue for an interpretation of minimalism that perhaps does not cover both art forms consistently (evaluation). This demonstrates more than "comprehension" of the materials, which can typically be measured by a fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice test. The students rarely just proved simple comprehension by repeating the content of the reading assignments through summary or paraphrase. Instead, they demonstrated higher order thinking skills through their ability to apply concepts in new contexts, to analyze, to synthesize ideas from disparate sources and source types, and to evaluate the quality of the ideas presented to them as well as the quality of the music studied.

In **Example 5** a student notes the prevalence of the visual in postmodern music and embeds an excellent example for discussion:

Example 5: Undergraduate student blog post on minimalism with embedded video.

> Ironically, the biggest influence on our audio art form comes from a website dedicated to video [YouTube]. But within this irony lies the inevitable future of music. It is starting to become increasingly rare for people to

> experience music without some kind of visual accompaniment. Possibly the first big push in this direction came with the rise of music videos. Now, even for songs without a video, we see them appearing on YouTube with some kind of visual, even if it is just a still image. Think about this: when is the last time you went out to "go hear a band play." Almost always, make plans to "go see a band," or "go watch the orchestra concert."
>
> Watch, not listen.
>
> There is no denying that this trend has impacted our art form, both from the standpoint of performers and composers. The result is composers taking visuals into greater consideration. Sometimes, it manifests itself in actions of the performer, like this:
>
> [Embedded video of Javier Alvarez's piece for maracas and tape, *Temazcal* (1984) performed with costume and choreograhy by Oscar Alblas.]
>
> It is interesting to note that when this piece was first written, there was no indication of any visual element. However, with the support of the composer, visuals and choreography have become a standard performance practice with this widely performed percussion piece.
>
> [. . . .]
>
> I would also like to just take a minute to point out that, without even thinking about it, I have written around 25 posts on my music blog, almost all of which contain YouTube videos.
>
> These visual practices are starting to blur the line between visual artists and composers. In the past, a choreographer would come up with the dance, a set designer would create visuals, and a composer would write the music. Today, one person can do all of these jobs. A good friend of mine recently completed a composition for solo percussion, accompanied by a live stream of photographs submitted by the audience. He is a music student, who intended to create a cool piece of percussion music. The premier will be in the Rochester Art Gallery.

Note that in addition to the recognition of how the visual has significantly changed how we experience music, the student reflected on the content of his own blog as a whole in the post and surveyed the prevalence of video and visual images used to illustrate musical ideas. Without being prompted to do so, the student naturally reflected on his own course work. I even decided that the musical example the student found to illustrate postmodernism is, in my opinion, *better* than the examples I had assigned as listening examples, and I will use it in the future.

The exercise of writing about the course content using a combination of visual art pieces, embedded audio and visual examples, creative writing, and expository prose is part of an integrated arts education. Proponents of

integrated arts education have found that teaching traditional "content knowledge" alongside and through creative expression has a number of advantages, and that criticism of integrated arts education is based on a number of false dichotomies. First, proponents of a "back-to-basics" approach to reading and writing ignore the vast amount of research by scholars such as Renate Nummela Caine, Geoffrey Caine, and Howard Gardner who have established that there is not a split between the intellectual and the sensory.[19] Second, a traditional education often separates content, skills, and concepts, while an integrated arts setting combines personal expression with expression of received knowledge. Third, an integrated arts approach does not make a distinction between the social and the personal, nor between the democratic and the elite. Integrated arts education specialist Arnold Aprill wrote, "There is art that exists to maintain traditions. There is art that exists to break traditions. There is art that exists for [the] exclusive connoisseur, and art that exists for democratic inclusion." Aprill (and others) finds the very "complexity and variability" of art, and the "fluidity of functions" that the arts possess to be their integrative force in education.[20] The blog writing demonstrated all of the above: the students balanced the personal and the social in their writing; they combined content, skills and concepts in their writing and creative work; and they challenged the ideas of the elite and the democratic in specific art practices. The blog format itself promoted fluidity and integration through the multi-media capabilities of the net

Engagement

The scholarly literature on "student engagement" has exploded since 1990 as teachers and researchers have tried to discover what students want in an educational setting and what will motivate them. Fred Newmann, Emeritus Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at University of Wisconsin–Madison, described engaged students as students who "make a psychological investment in learning. They try hard to learn what school offers. They take pride not simply in earning the formal indicators of success (grades), but in understanding the material and incorporating or internalizing it in their lives."[21] In my experience, the blog assignment increased student engagement in this particular setting in three ways. First, the immediacy of the medium

19. Renate Nummela Caine and Geoffrey Caine, *Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain* (Wheaton, MD: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1991) and Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

20. Gail Burnaford, Arnold Aprill, and Cynthia Weiss, editors, *Renaissance in the Classroom: Arts Integration and Meaningful Learning* (New York: Routledge, 2009), xli.

21. Fred Newmann, ed., *Student Engagement and Achievement in American Secondary Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 2–3.

allowed their writing to be integrated directly into the classroom; second, the writing and ensuing classroom discussion often created peer-to-peer learning opportunities; and third, the blog connected their classroom work to a familiar environment for many students—the web—increasing excitement about the course materials.

The fact that the blogs were immediately available upon completion enabled me to use a "just in time" teaching strategy, pulling out particularly great content from the blogs to use for class discussion.[22] I was able to guide classroom discussion around written and audio/visual examples posted in the blogs and create discussion that almost always involved every student in the room. I regularly called on students who were hesitant to bring up discussion topics in class because I knew that they had made particularly enlightening points on their blogs. I could form each class period around material that I knew ahead of time that the students were prepared to discuss and I was able to avoid having the class derailed by just one or two students who enjoyed talking. I knew the students were prepared for class because they had already written about the course materials, and I also knew when certain students might not be prepared if they had not posted.

The time span between the writing and the feedback was minimal. Students did not have to wait for "course correction," so-to-speak. If there was some kind of misunderstanding demonstrated in the students' writing for that class period, I was able to address it in a timely manner. It is in this context that the students received feedback on their writing, albeit indirectly. While I never corrected or commented on grammatical mistakes, students found out quickly through discussion if they had not communicated as well as they had intended. We enjoyed an accelerated environment because of the immediacy of the medium. Students did not have to wait for the instructor to grade and return papers. Blogging eliminated the time-intensive assignment/grade/return paper cycle.

Beyond basic class interactions, the format allowed the students to make connections between unfamiliar course materials and areas where they already had mastery, allowing the student to write from the position of the specialist. All of the examples above demonstrate this to a certain degree. Nonetheless, I was often surprised by connections students made in their writing that at first seemed tenuous, but were in the end compelling. **Example 6** is an example of a student making connections between the assigned

22. Just-in-Time Teaching strategies are designed to make more effective use of the students' time in class by having the students work in some way online before class. See Gregor Novak, et. al., *Just-in-Time Teaching: Blending Active Learning and Web Technology*, (Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999) and Scott Simkins and Mark Maier eds., *Just-in-Time Teaching: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2010).

topic (experimental electronic music) to a topic where he had significant mastery (dubstep):

Example 6: Undergraduate student blog post on early electronic music and dubstep.

> Varese, Skrillex, Cage, and Rusko: The Impact of Avant Garde Composers on Dubstep
>
> A few nights ago I sat down to listen to the pieces assigned for class this week. As luck would have it, about half way through I began having trouble with the [school's] website, and had to turn to YouTube for recordings. I searched for Edgar Varese's *Poeme Électronique*, and started to listen to the first link I found. I was mesmerized by the sounds, lost in the textures Varese had created. As the piece continued, out of curiosity I began to scroll through the comments left by other listeners bellow the video. That's when I saw a comment I was never expecting. Posted second on the list was the simple phrase:
>
> "primitive dubstep"
>
> At first I was outraged, even offended by Guitarmaster332's comment. What does he know!? How dare he compare the genius of Varese to loud, bassy, scratchy club music!? What business did he have likening the complex textures of *Poeme Électornique* to the simplicities of dubstep, with its 5 minutes spent on one chord and fascination with the quarter note triplet as if it were the most innovative rhythmic device of our generation!? What the hell was this guy thinking!?!?!?!
>
> But then I took a breath, and removed my judgmental "student of music" hat. That's when I realized something…
>
> He was totally right.
>
> Well, to an extent. The sounds, the ideas, the textures… they could all be found in some fashion in modern popular electronic music. Even with my limited knowledge of the dubstep craze, I knew there were in fact connections. And the more I dove in and listened to the style, the more I began to believe in Guitarmaster322's words. Even though the word "primitive" is overly harsh and fairly disrespectful of Varese's work, the idea of this piece laying the foundation for future electronic musicians was clear.

The student went on to demonstrate sonic similarities and use of noise in both Varese and Skrillex, using YouTube videos and time markers in order to point the reader to specific examples. He also compared "the drop" in dubstep—which the student defined as an "increase in intensity, followed by a brief moment of silence, and then finally an intensely loud entrance of the bass"—to Cage's use of silence. When students made these kinds of connections on their blogs, they were encouraged to present their observations and analyses

to the class, which created an atmosphere of peer-to-peer instruction, and as one might imagine, lively debate.

The blog allowed the students to connect their classroom work to the "real world," and for some this was incredibly exciting. Several students wrote on their course evaluations at the end of the semester that their levels of engagement were heightened simply because of the nature of the public medium. My anecdotal experience has been supported by the research of Stanford English professor Andrea Lunsford, who studies how new technologies, such as texting, have changed how students write. Lunsford told *The New York Times*, "We're trying to figure out how to preserve sustained, logical, carefully articulated arguments while engaging with the most exciting and promising new literacies." While gathering data about writing outcomes, Lunsford and her team have also solicited feedback from students about their writing experiences. Her conclusion is that students are much more engaged by the use of new communication tools. "They love writing for an audience, engaging with it. They feel as if they're actually producing something personally rewarding and valuable, whereas when they write a term paper, they feel as if they do so only to produce a grade."[23]

Life skills

The final outcomes relate to simple skills necessary for success as students and productive graduates. While almost all of what we do as professors encourages students to manage their time better, the work intensive nature of the semester-long project forced the students to confront time management issues. Blogging discouraged what the psychologist Robert Boice called "binge writing." Boice noticed that there were essentially two types of young scholars—those who wrote regularly and at a modest pace; and those who believed that "creative agony" was a normal part of their work process and worked in binges. Boice reported that binge writers believe "that binges of writing offer special advantages, including loosened, brilliant thinking and rare opportunities for quick, efficient completions of overdue projects." Binge work patterns are generally associated with "genius" and are romanticized in the media, as in the *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoon below (**Example 7**). However, Boice's study of young scholars concluded that binge writers "(a) accomplished far less

23. Matt Richtel, "Blogs vs. Term Papers," *New York Times,* (January 20, 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/22/education/edlife/muscling-in-on-the-term-paper-tradition.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2. See also, Andrea Lunsford, et. al., *Everyone's an Author* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012) and Jenn Fishman, Andrea Lunsford, Beth McGregor, and Mark Otuteye, "Performing Writing, Performing Literacy" *College Composition and Communication*, 57 (Dec 2005): 224–52.

writing overall, (b) got fewer editorial acceptances, (c) scored higher on the Beck Depression Inventory, and (d) listed fewer creative ideas for writing."[24]

Example 7: Binge work patterns in the writing process.

Calvin and Hobbes © 1992, Bill Watterson, used by permission of Universal Uclick, all rights reserved.

We tend to encourage binge writing with large writing assignments such as a research paper, even when we try to discourage such behavior by breaking the large assignment into various stages and parts. This behavior is encouraged by the weight that a term paper typically holds in the balance of the final grade, but also in how we value the preparatory assignments. The paper outline, opening statement, or annotated bibliography, when graded, are typically valued with the same weight as a homework assignment, while the final draft typically holds the anxiety-provoking lion's share of points. Blogging ideally encouraged the habit of regular writing in modest proportions, even when creative ideas were lacking and the writing was not brilliant.

Blog vs. Research Paper (A False Dichotomy)

The research paper has come under attack lately from educators like Duke University's Cathy Davidson who believes that the term paper format "invites, even requires, linguistic and syntactic gobbledegook." She noticed that when her students wrote for an audience online, their writing exhibited "fewer typographical and factual errors, less plagiarism, and generally better, more elegant, and persuasive prose than classroom assignments by the same writers." She noted that when students were writing in order to get a good grade, communication became "a secondary point."[25] While I have had similar experiences to Davidson's, I assert that the decision to assign a blog *or* a

24. Bob Boice, "Which is More Productive, Writing in Binge Patterns of Creative Illness or in Moderation?" *Written Communication* 14 (1997): 436, 435.

25. Cathy Davidson, *Now You See It: How the Brain Science of Attention Will Transform the Way We Live, Work, and Learn* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 101.

research paper is not an either/or proposition. The two assignments are different and both target different learning outcomes.

One of the difficulties with the research paper is the issue of audience. Imagine a face-to-face conversation in which you receive no feedback from your listener. In many ways, writing a research paper is like such a face-to-face conversation where the student has one powerful reader who gives no indication of whether she is agreeing with you or even understanding you. According to Elbow, writing for a professor is a difficult business. The professor likely knows much more than the student on the topic assigned, and so communicating meaning to the professor is on the one hand easy, since the professor is already very knowledgeable about the topic. On the other hand, Elbow suggests that the professor really isn't listening to the student. The instructor "usually isn't in a position where he can be genuinely affected by your words. He doesn't expect your words actually to make a dent on him. He doesn't treat your words like real reading. He has to read them as an exercise."[26]

Writing for the imaginary blog reader, therefore, becomes simultaneously more difficult and immensely easier. It is more difficult to try to communicate specialized material to a general audience. Topics that a professor would immediately grasp have to be handled much more carefully. On the other hand, the knowledge that the reader is potentially *actually reading,* and not just reading in order to assign a grade, is liberating. As demonstrated in the writing examples above, the students were more at ease in their writing and wrote for a broader audience—not just the terrifying audience of one. I surveyed the students after the course about their blogging experiences and several indicated that they enjoyed the more comfortable writing environment. One student wrote,

> Blogging gave me a chance to reflect on what I head read and listened to, and react in a totally genuine way. I did not have to worry about the formalities of scholarly writing, or following certain criteria for an assignment. I was able to speak openly and honestly, and that made my reflections so much more meaningful and valuable.[27]

When compared to the strong brew of the term paper assignment, the blog will inevitably be considered weak tea to professors who value traditional literacies over digital literacies. There is indeed value in carefully gathering research, crafting an argument or analysis and defending it with evidence, citing sources appropriately, and struggling to communicate within the formality of the term paper format. It is more difficult to achieve these writing outcomes in the blog format. While some students may go on to graduate

26. Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers,* 127.
27. Survey results appear in Appendix B.

school and continue to write for the "audience of one," all students need to be able to communicate with a broad audience as they create program notes, press releases, articles, grant applications, and even continue to blog after graduation.

Assessment

Clearly, the decision to have students blog has to be made with specific learning outcomes in mind. If assessment is to measure the success of the student to achieve the desired outcomes, then the assessment has to be designed with the medium in mind. Understanding that blogging facilitates specific types of writing as well as specific types of thinking and discovery should shape how we assess the blogs. I valued creativity and freedom above traditional content knowledge in this course, so I graded the blogs as either complete or incomplete. While this sounds simple enough, there were times when I wondered what constituted "complete." It is interesting to note that the blog rubric below from the University of Wisconsin-Stout, is weighted almost exactly upside-down from the traditional term paper rubric:

> Content and Creativity = 40%
> Voice = 20%
> Text Layout, Use of Graphics and Multimedia = 20%
> Timeliness and Tags = 10%
> Citations = 5%
> Quality of Writing and Proofreading = 5%[28]

What I value very highly in the students' blogs is their sense of exploration, even a sense of *play* with the course materials. **Example 8** is an excerpt from a sophomore composition major:

Example 8: Undergradate student blog demonstrating play with course matierals.

> I had an interesting time listening to the excerpt from LaMonte Young's *Drift Studies*. I first put it on as I was shuffling about my kitchen in the evening making lunch for the next day. I was paying half-attention to it as it played through my little laptop speakers, noting the drone's subtle shifts in pitch, when I realized that those changes were contingent on the

28. http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/profdev/rubrics/blogrubric.html. Mark Sample created a four-point rubric that values engagement with the materials and insightful writing. See "A Rubric for Evaluating Student Blogs," *The Chronicle of Higher Education, Prof Hacker* (September 27, 2010), http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/a-rubric-for-evaluating-student-blogs/27196. See also Julie Meloni, "Integrating, Evaluating, and Managing Blogging in the Classroom," *The Chronicle of Higher Education, Prof Hacker* (August 13, 2009), http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/integrating-evaluatingmanaging-blogging-in-the-classroom/22626.

> motion of my shuffling around. I jumped all around the room to hear the difference from various locations; just shaking my head changed the sound. I picked up my computer and waved it around in the air, over my head and behind. My cat gave me a funny look.
>
> The bit in the Gann[29] about the actual physical properties accounting for this phenomenon went a bit over my head, but I'd love to try more to understand why and how this works. Listening to the piece now with headphones, I hear nothing but a strait [sic] tone. Unplug things, and a whole world of subtle variation opens up.

The student's writing is informal but engaging, and indicates that he completed the reading and listening assignment conscientiously. His insights about the nature of the piece and how it is dependent on the physical presence of the listener are entirely accurate. But what is most delightful and surprising is the personal voice, the creativity of the narrative, and the way that he recreates the discovery processes in the writing so that the reader might experience it as well. While I could take the notorious red pen to a research paper and mark it up, it actually pains me to point out the spelling error at the end of the blog excerpt because I am much more interested in his process of discovery than I am his spelling. I found myself truly engaged—not just reading in order to assign a grade.

Conclusion

Building on my experiences with the blog assignment, there are a number of things I would like to improve upon in the future. First, I need to employ a grade rubric that reflects what I value in the assignment. Instead of grading the blogs as "complete/incomplete," I will likely draw heavily from Mark Sample's four-point rubric cited above. The "exceptional" blog will include writing that is focused, analytical, reflective, creative, and considers multiple perspectives. Second, the students need some encouragement to read each other's blogs and to interact online. I have considered requiring comments to peer blogs, but I will more likely have students rotate through a moderator role—not only reading all the blogs for a specific class period, but also preparing to guide the class discussion. Third, I plan to be more deliberate about distributing the larger assignments. The overwhelming response after the class was over was that the writing load was quite heavy, and if they could change one thing about the course, most students would have made the blogs due only once a week. However, a semester later a number of students said that they derived significant benefits from the writing. While I am hesitant to cut the writing requirements in half, I do plan to be more conscientious about

29. Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century,* 190–91.

scheduling the larger reading and listening assignments when the students have more time, (i.e., over the weekend and not during the week).

Finally, as I consider extending this exercise to other courses, I plan to keep the issue of "audience" in the foreground, especially with younger students. I have prepared a meta-cognitive, in-class writing exercise that have them consider the issue of audience directly. The students will be asked to free write on a grid containing two columns: "The Professor as Audience" and "The Blogosphere as Audience." In each column they will be asked to consider characteristics of writing for both audiences, the values and priorities of each, and specific writing strategies that are commonly employed for each audience. This exercise can be used to address common blogging mistakes, such employing an overly informal tone, or using texting abbreviations. Through class discussion, the students and professor can come to an agreement about what would constitute good writing for each audience.[30]

While I may have had "old school" student learning outcomes (analysis, better writing) as a goal at the beginning of the course, I have since started to think about how the web is an important tool for a new kind of literacy, and, according to scholar Jessie Blackburn, "it is likely our students' *primary* literacy—their preferred mode of interaction with information." Blackburn presents a challenge to those who wish to teach this generation to read and write. "It is no longer enough," she asserts, "to sit proudly behind our computers as we drop our courses into Blackboard or allow our students to access our libraries' electronic databases to read *our* journals that are now posted online." Instead, we have to acknowledge the "critical literacies that are in play" as students interact with each other and with content online.[31] Meeting the students on their home turf (as in a blog) instead of on ours (as in a research paper), we might find that they are more articulate, analytical, critical, and engaged than we have previously thought.

30. See also Jack Jobst, "Audience and Purpose in Writing," in *Language Connections: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*, Toby Fulwiler, Art Young, and Heidi Scott, eds. (WAC Clearinghouse Landmark Publications in Writing Studies, 2000): 57–76, http://wac.colostate.edu/books/language_connections/.

31. Jessie Blackburn, "The Web Surfer: What (Literacy) Skills Does It Take To Surf Anyway?" *Composition Forum* 21 (Spring 2010), http://compositionforum.com/issue/21/web-surfer.php.

Appendix A: Syllabus for Ithaca College, School of Music, MUTH 481/581 The American Avant Garde (Spring 2012)

Text
Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century*

On-line Course Supplement
Additional course materials (readings and listening assignments) will be available through Sakai and on the library's e-reserves.

Purpose
To examine trends in music, style, social institutions, and cultural events that define the American experimental music and the avant garde.

Course Requirements
Your final grade is based on the following:

1) Attendance
2) Blog
3) Graphic Notation Composition
4) Final Project
5) GRADUATE STUDENTS; You will select one of the major listening examples on the course schedule and you will be in charge of leading the class through a detailed study of the piece. Please look over the syllabus now and make aselection early. You will turn in notes associated with your presentation on the day of the presentation.

All of the above factors are weighted equally. There are no exams.

1. Attendance
Required. Excused absences: serious illness (written medical documentation must be provided), death in family (obituary and/or funeral program must be provided), required IC activity (note from sponsoring faculty member), religious observances (with one week prior notice), or appearance in a court of law (with appropriate documentation).

Scheduling professional engagements or family travel over class time should be avoided, because it is not the responsibility of the professor to make special arrangements for students including examinations. You are responsible for what you have missed, obtaining course notes from colleagues, getting copies of handouts from Sakai, etc.

2. Blog
You are expected to maintain a blog that reflects criticism of all of the reading and listening assignments. I encourage you to express yourself through the blog and to create a positive web presence. Your blogs are due at midnight on Mondays and Wednesdays. This allows me time to review the blogs and to highlight especially interesting discussion material.

You can create a blog at blogspot.com or any other blog hosting site. Please e-mail me the URL of your blog so that I can start to follow your work. My blog is: http://paintedstrings.blogspot.com/

3. Graphic Notation Project
We will be creating performance pieces that use graphic notation scores as part of our study. You will be responsible for assembling an ensemble of "instruments" using recycled materials. We will be performing these works as part of Ithaca College's participation in "Recyclemania."

4. Final Project
Keeping with the spirit of the course content, your final project may be one of the following:

A. A traditional term paper which will show your knowledge of:
   1. the topic per se.
   2. scholarly writing style.
   3. graphic reproduction resources appropriate to the demands of writing about music.
   4. proper citation and bibliography formatting. Page length for undergrads: 7; page length for graduate students: 14.

B. A substantial musical composition, fixed media, multimedia work, film, or dance, etc. These compositions should be able to be performed or presented during class. An artist's "manifesto" (typed, 3–4 pages) will accompany these works describing the composition process and defending the aesthetic view of the artist.

C. As it is the centennial of John Cage's birth, you may chose a significant work by the composer, rehearse, and video record a performance of the piece. These videos will be added to a "living archive" on-line organized by the New York Public Library called "John Cage Unbound." (For more information: http://vimeo.com/johncageunbound) A 3–4 page scholarly study of the piece will accompany the final project. You may work in groups for the performance, but the papers must be done individually.

Computation of Grades
The final grade in the course will be a mathematical average of the points earned in the assignments listed above. The average will be translated into a letter grade according to the following schedule.*

95–100=A 90–94=A-
87–89=B+ 83–86=B 80–82=B-
77–79=C+ 73–76=C 70–72=C below
70=F

_____

* Fractions will be rounded off to the nearest whole number (e.g., 67.49 would be rounded off to 67; 67.5 would be rounded off to 68.)

Class Policies
• No late assignments or make up work associated with unexcused absences.
• If for some compelling reason it is impossible to turn an assignment in on time, you must contact me in advance to make arrangements for turning it in.
• No e-mail or phone discussions of grades as per privacy rights. Please see me during office hours or by appointment about these matters.
• Class disruptions (talking, cell phones, use of personal computer), leaving class early, and excessive lateness will lower your final grade, and I may ask you to leave and/or withdraw from the class.
• E-mail correspondence ONLY through the Ithaca College Mail system.

Student Disabilities Services
In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodation will be provided to students with documented disabilities on a case-by-case basis. Students must register with Student Disability Services and provide appropriate documentation to the College before any academic adjustment will be provided. Please see me right away if you have such documentation.

Class Schedule:

Jan. 24: Course Introduction
Assignment: (1) Set up your blog, (2) Read the *Grove Music On-line* article "Avant Garde" and the Wikipedia entries "Avant garde Music" and "Experimental Music." Blog about the problems associated with the terms. Do you feel confident that you could define what is "avant garde" and what is "experimental?" What should we call the rest? Traditionalist? By what criteria do we make these distinctions? Please feel free to use images, videos, and/or sounds clips to illustrate your points. (Length: at least 500 words.)

Jan. 26: "Experimental" vs "Avant Garde" traditions
Reading Assignment: "Avant-garde and Experimental Music" in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, pp. 517–34

Jan. 31: Ives and contemporaries
Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 1
Listening Assignment: Charles Ives, *Three Places in New England*, *The Things Our Fathers Loved* (song); Carl Ruggles, *Sun-treader*; Charles Tomlinson Griffes: *The Fountains of the Acqua Paola* (video on Sakai class site)
Blog about the reading and the listening

Feb. 2: Ives, Sonata No. 2 "The Concord"
Listening Assignment: Ives, Sonata No. 2 "The Concord," mvmt. 3 "The Alcotts"

Feb. 7: Cowell, Antheil, Varese and Crawford Seeger
Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 2; Cowell "New Musical Resources"; "Edgard Varese" in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, pp. 195–208
Listening Assignment: Henry Cowell, *Tiger*, *The Banshee*; George Antheil, *Balet mécanique*; Varese, *Hyperprism, Poème électronique*; Ruth Crawford Seeger: *Music for Small Orchestra*
Blog about the reading and the listening

Feb. 9: Populists
Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 3
Listening Assignment: Roy Harris, Symphony No. 3; Virgil Thomson, *Mother of Us All*
Blog about the reading and the listening

Feb. 14: Partch, Johnston, Nancarrow
Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 4; "Harry Partch" in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, pp. 209–20; "Ben Johnston" in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, pp. 430–39
Listening Assignment: Harry Partch, *Barstow*; Ben Johnston, String Quartet No. 4, Suite for Microtonal Piano; Conlon Nancarrow, Studies for Player Piano (Study No. 25 and No. 36)
Blog about the reading and the listening; link your blog to this URL: http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/feature_partch.html (play the instruments!)

Feb. 16: Special Topic #1: Aesthetics of the Avant Garde
- Reading Assignment: Arthur C. Danto, "The Abuse of Beauty"
- Blog about the reading

Feb. 21: Neoclassicists and American Serialists
- Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 5; "Milton Babbitt" in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, pp. 243–50; "Postwar Compositional Issues" in Music in the Western World, pp. 514–17
- Listening Assignment: Roger Sessions, Sonata No. 3, Symphony No. 3; Stefan Wolpe, *Form*; Elliot Carter, String Quartet No. 2
- Blog about the reading and the listening

Feb. 23:, Cage Part 1
- Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 6; excerpts from *Silence* pp. 3–6, 18–34, 109–26
- Listening Assignment: Sonatas and Interludes; Concert for Piano, *Music of Changes*
- Blog about the reading and the listening

Feb. 28: Cage Part 2
- Reading Assignment: *A Year From Monday*, pp. 50–52; *Composition in Retrospect*, 11–18
- Blog about the reading; think also about other artists, poets, musicians and dancers that have been influenced by Cage. Try to link your blog up to their work.

Mar. 1: New York School
- Reading Assignment: "Morton Feldman" in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music,* pp. 362–66
- Listening Assignment: Morton Feldman, *King of Denmark*, Piece for Four Pianos, *Rothko Chapel*; Christian Wolff, *Long piano (Peace March 11)*, Exercises; Earle Brown, *November, 1952*
- Blog about the reading and the listening

Mar. 6: Graphic Notation Project
- Reading Assignment: http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/Picturing-Music-The- Return-of-Graphic-Notation/
- Blog about your notation, scan (if necessary) and post in blog

Mar. 8: Special Topic #2: Politics of the Avant Garde
- Reading Assignment: Sara Heimbecker, "HPSCHD, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and Utopia"

Blog about the reading

Spring Break

Mar. 20: Conceptualism
- Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 7; Ben Piekut, "Death by Cello" in *Experimentalism Otherwise*, pp. 140–76, 236–44; "Pauline Oliveros" in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, pp. 415–20
- Listening Assignment: Robert Ashley, *Perfect Lives*; Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Mediations*; James Tenney, *Chromatic Canon*; Alvin Lucier, *I am Sitting In A Room*; Roger Reynolds, *The Emperor of Ice Cream*; Joan La Barbara, *Atmos*
- Blog about the reading and listening

Mar. 22: Minimalism Part 1: Young, Riley, Reich
- Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 8; "Steve Reich" in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, pp. 421–24
- Listening Assignment: LaMonte Young, *Well-Tuned Piano*, Excerpt from *Map Of 49's Dream the Two Systems of Eleven Sets Of Galactic Intervals…*; Steve Reich, *Eight Lines*, *Piano Phase*
- Blog about the reading and listening

Mar. 27: Minimalism Part 2: Glass and Monk
- Listening Assignment: Philip Glass, *Akhnaten*, *Einstein on the Beach*; Meredith Monk, *Atlas*
- Blog about the reading and listening

Mar. 29: New Romanticists
- Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 9
- Listening Assignment: George Rochberg, Bagatelles for Piano, Short Sonatas, String Quartet No. 3; George Crumb, *Black Angels*; John Adams, *Grand Pianola Music*; Frederic Rzewski, *Coming Together, People United Will Never Be Defeated!*
- Blog about the reading and listening

Apr. 3: Electronic Music
- Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 10
- Listening Assignment: Morton Subotnik, *Silver Apples of the Moon*; Charles Dodge, *Viola Elegy*; Pauline Oliveros, *Bye Bye Butterfly*; Alvin Lucier, *Music on a Long, Thin Wire*; Carl Stone, *Shing Kee*; David Rosenboom, *Systems of Judgment*

Blog about the reading and listening; find some new electronic/computer music

Apr. 5: NO CLASS TODAY

Apr. 10: Jazz and the Avant Garde
Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 11; "Gunther Schuller" in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, pp. 408–14; "Art Ensemble of Chicago" in *All American Music*, pp. 164–75; glance through http://www.criticalimprov.com/article/viewArticle/462/992
Listening Assignment: Charles Mingus, *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady*; Anthony Braxton, Composition Nos. 40B, 40A, 40G; John Zorn, *Cobra*, *Forbidden Fruit*
Blog about the reading and the listening

Apr. 12: Rock and the Avant Garde
Listening Assignment: Laurie Anderson, *O Superman*; Rhys Chatham, *An Angel Moves too Fast to See*; Pink Floyd, *Dark Side of the Moon*
Blog about the listening. Post links to what you consider avant garde rock, or rock inspired avant garde

Apr. 17: Special Topic #3: Race and the Avant Garde
Reading Assignment: "White Noise: Race and Erasure in the Cultural Avant-Garde"
Blog about the reading

Apr. 19: Postminimalism
Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 12
Listening Assignment: William Duckworth, *Time Curve Preludes*; Janice Giteck, *Om Shanti*; Daniel Lentz, *The Crack in the Bell*
Blog about the reading and the listening

Apr. 24: Totalism
Reading Assignment: Gann Chapter 13
Listening Assignment: Mikel Rouse, *Dennis Cleveland* (Opera); Michael Gordon, *Four Kings Fight Five*; John Luther Adams, *Dream in White on White*; Larry Polanski, *Lonesome Road*
Blog about the reading and the listening

Apr. 26: Special Topic #4: Postmodernism and Music

Reading Assignment: Review Gann pp. 243–51; "Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism" in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, pp. 13–26
Listening Assignment: William Bolcom, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*; Lukas Foss, *Baroque Variations*, *Time Cycle*
Blog about the reading and the listening

May 1 and 3: Student Presentations

FINAL EXAM: Student Presentations

Appendix B: Blogging for "The American Avant Garde" Post-Course Survey May 2012

1. What was the best thing about blogging for the Avant Garde class?

Being able to better understand the subject matter by concentrating on certain key aspects of the evening's reading assignment.
The best thing about blogging for avant garde was the ability to say and blog about what you specifically thought about the reading.
Being able to focus on a single or broad topics of our choice, whether we enjoyed, adored, were confused by, or wanted to simply explore a topic of interest.
Being asked to write on a more frequent basis forced me to probe deeper into the material earlier on in the semester.
It really challenged me to think more critically about the reading and listening and to come up with my own opinions.
Blogging gave me a chance to reflect on what I head read and listened to, and react in a totally genuine way. I did not have to worry about the formalities of scholarly writing, or following certain criteria for an assignment. I was able to speak openly and honestly, and that made my reflections so much more meaningful and valuable.
It forced us to think critically, integrate the reading content to our own musical background, and search for new connections with the current musical community. It was especially easy and insightful to engage with popular culture.
The simple fact that it is a 'new' type of assignment, and it let us all be creative. It made class discussion more engaging because everyone had taken the time to think about the material through their blogs.

2. What was the worst thing about blogging for the Avant Garde class?

The frequency of which it was assigned.

While I overall liked the idea of blogging, the amount of time that was required to do each of the blogs was quite high. This really only affected the blogs that were due on

Wednesday nights. Between Monday and Wednesday not many people had enough time to really prepare as much as needed. I also think that the blogs would have been more useful in class if we had a specific topic that we all needed to discuss. Sometimes I felt like I was on a completely different page than others.

When blogging for Thursday's class and there was a lengthy or incredibly dense reading due for that blog (or if it was simply something that I found uninteresting or difficult to understand personally). This material was always available far in advance, but naturally I wouldn't really enjoy moving towards it more than 2 nights before it was due (only applicable to Thursday readings/blogs!)

Some weeks, it was very difficult to come up with anything meaningful to say about a particular topic.

Too much work when combined with all the reading! I wouldn't mind doing 1 blog a week, but 2 is soooooo much. I also sometimes felt I was running out of things to say and I was forcing myself to write about something I didn't have time to think about.

Since many of the blogs were in reaction to our text, it meant that there was no real potential audience for our writing aside from out classmates. Although I don't know how this could be avoided and still create blogs relevant to the class, it was at times disappointing to think that our blogs would not likely be read by others.

The blogs took a lot of time. I often spent twice as much time writing the blog than doing the reading! Frequently, I did the reading and just wanted to think about it without having to come up with something insightful or creative to post in reaction.

It was hard to do it for every class, with the listening, since there was a 'long' period (RT) and a short period (T-R) Can,t think of anything.

3. Was the blogging interface difficult to use?

No: 100%

4. Did you feel more prepared for class after having blogged about the listening and reading assignments?

Much more prepared:	55.6%
Somewhat more prepared:	44.4%
It didn't make a difference:	0%

Comments:

We really had to know the content to blog on it. I felt very accountable.

5. Did you read your colleagues' blogs?

Often: 22.2% Sometimes: 66.7% Never: 11.1%

Comments:

Seldom. I spent so much time reading and then working on my own post that I didn't take the time to engage with others. Of course, reacting to others would have been a good source for blogging material . . .

6. What would you change about this assignment?

Occasionally narrowing the scope of the evening's blog to one or two important concepts covered in the reading.

Like I said above, I would have given more specific directions about what to blog over. I also think that more time should be allowed for blogging between the mon and wed night due dates.

Occasionally it was great to have free-response blogs in which we discussed a topic of our choice from the readings (ex. "Read _____," blog about the readings and the listenings). However, it would occasionally be productive to have blog questions or assignments that might narrow down the options for discussion, especially in cases where the reading assignment is long and/or dense, or if the class discussion is going to be geared towards a certain topic (for example, a few times I found myself focusing on something that was completely different than the class discussion the following day, and even though my blogging felt productive, I was a little more lost than others who happened to focus on something more relevant)

I would have focused on either listening or reading more often, as it was difficult to keep our blog entries both comprehensive and concise.

I would just cut down on the frequency in which the blogs are due or somehow split up the amount of reading and blogging in a different way.

Maybe if the blogs were less frequent, it would be easier to read those of our classmates. However, I did think it was nice to have written something before nearly every class.

It was frequently a pain, but was a great project. Toward the end, I got especially tired of doing them, but they were good to do.

Just making the work load more sensitive to the class meetings

Nothing, I thought it was great!

7. Do you plan to continue blogging?

Yes: 66.7% No: 33.3%