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Don't Do-It-Yourself: The Exquisite Corpse and Collaborative Play in Undergraduate Electronic Music Pedagogy

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Demonstration (25 minutes)

ABSTRACT

In the early stages of learning electronic music production, undergraduate students often feel frustrated by a combination of a) their limited technical experience and skill, b) the overwhelming magnitude of options available to them, and c) and their desire to produce a polished musical track, as quickly as possible. By introducing collaborative and iterative improvisational tactics like the Exquisite Corpse—an early twentieth-century surrealist tool for sharing in creative play—students can bypass the anxieties associated with authorial individualism, rapidly building confidence as well as expertise.

In this demonstration, I outline a two-tiered, four-week curricular application of the Exquisite Corpse to a series of elementary compositional techniques available in the DAW—from subtractive synthesis and MIDI pattern generation to track (re)arrangement and (re)mixing—examining collaboration's practical and theoretical advantages in the electronic music curriculum, and in particular the myriad technical and social benefits of continuous peer-to-peer feedback via collective creation and the pooling of sonic materials.

I further reflect on how the Exquisite Corpse and other improvisational games can mediate a liberating reconceptualization of electronic music beyond the solitary, linear production of complete works, emphasizing instead an appreciation of musicking as a dynamic techno-social practice through which agency is distributed reciprocally among a flexible network of subjects, objects, sounds, and spacetime. To conclude, I argue that electronic music's reflexive

relationship between production and (re)production offers a unique medium through which to develop and inspire new modes of community-oriented creativity in the classroom.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

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Joshua Biggs is a composer, improviser, researcher, and educator from Cape Town, South Africa. Drawing from theories of music cognition, sound- and media studies, Biggs's work explores how embodiment, enculturation, and self-expression surface through diverse listening, composing, and performing practices. Their recent research, both creative and scholarly, investigates the conceptual friction between performance and playback, and more specifically, the iterative and regulative experience of control and constraint in improvisatory and indeterminate sonic practice. Biggs is also inspired by the inscriptive power of music—how music entrains bodies and technologies as temporally entangled archives of sound.

Over the last several years, Biggs has been fortunate to collaborate on their sample-based creative practice with various internationally-acclaimed performers and ensembles—among them Wet Ink Ensemble, Vicki Ray, Yarn-Wire, Greg Stuart (USA), the Tilikum Percussion Trio (Canada), and the Tacet(i) Ensemble (Thailand)—and have had further opportunities to present works at various festivals and residencies, including SEAMUS, NYCMEF, the SPLICE Institute (USA), the Seoul International Computer Music Festival (Korea), the Thailand New Music and Arts Symposium (Thailand), and the National Arts Festival Makhanda (South Africa).

Biggs is currently a Visiting Lecturer in Recorded Musics and Technical Director for the Music Department at NYU, and holds degrees from Cornell University (DMA, 2024) and Oberlin Conservatory (BM, 2017).