Assignment 2 (composition)

After having read about a number of computer-aided compositional ideas, given presentations about different composers, and heard some first experiments, this second assignment is to write a piece, using some idea emanating from that material. While I’d like you, when presenting your piece to us, to briefly discuss where/who/what the idea(s) emanate(s) from, I’m not particularly interested in adherence to or imitation of something else.

In the article “Cocks Crow…” (in this week’s readings), I talk about different compositional methods which attempt to “offload” the compositional process in different ways, and for different reasons. In the pieces I discuss, some could be called “determinist” (as in Johnson’s Rational Melodies), some strategic (Wolff’s Exercises), and some probabilistic, or semi-deterministic (Burt’s My Monodies, Ames’ Artifacts). There is, I think, some kind of multi-dimensional (and non-linear) continuum between the completely non-deterministic and the completely deterministic. This continuum is shaped by the gravitational pulls of things like rules, random and probabilistic processes, and the complexities of human (performer, composer, listener) interaction with what the compositional methods produce.

Without asking you to pick a particular location on that continuum, this assignment is to write a short piece via software or some algorithmic method of your choice, explicitly keeping this continuum in mind. For example, you might say to yourself “I am going to write a completely determinate piece” or “I am going to write a completely indeterminate piece” or “I am going to write a piece that is determinate with respect to the composition of pitch but indeterminate with respect to rhythm”; or...

This assignment is as simple as it is vague, with the most specific aspect being that I want you to articulate the rule vs. chance/computer determinism vs. performer indeterminism/algorithmic vs. human choice decisions that
you have made, both in a very short piece of writing and in your introduction of the piece to the class.