

## **MUSC 2230: Composing and Improvising with Real-Time Systems**

MEME @ Brown University Music Department | Fall 2013

Dr John Robert Ferguson (Visiting Assistant Professor)

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Office Hours: Orwig 313, by appointment or drop in (I'll be around, come talk to me!)

Class times: Mon. 3:00 – 5:20pm

Location: Steinert 205

### **Aims and objectives:**

This seminar will explore the relationship between humans and their technologies; the overall aim is to develop conceptual discussion and practical experimentation, which will culminate in (at least) two concerts and a variety of web-based outputs, as well as a short piece of reflective writing.

In probing the relationship between humans, interfaces, and sonic materials, this seminar will ask: how useful are established notions of composition and improvisation in a contemporary 'real-time' age? And is there space for 'comprovisation'? What makes a good/expressive digital/electronic instrument? Should the design of these instruments follow the established blueprint of their acoustic and electromechanical counterparts, or should new technologies equate to new musics and new forms of musical expression? Although harnessing the intelligence of the human body through movement and touch can be highly productive, is the decipherability of human agency/presence always important? What is it that makes this agency/presence decipherable? And what are the alternatives?

In undertaking this seminar it is hoped that all participants will develop individual answers to some of the above questions.

### **How will this work?**

A number of technical and aesthetic themes will be introduced and interpreted through group discussion (initially, we will consider various conceptualizations of resistance, effort, and interactivity) - these discussions will function as 'jumping-off' points for practical activity during the first half of the seminar. The results of this activity will feed into a mid-term concert, which will be documented and disseminated in order to inform further work. During the latter stages of the seminar participants will develop an individual project, which will be presented at a final concert that may involve collaboration.

An online canvas/discussion board will be updated regularly as the seminar progresses, all participants are expected to add material/edit this; it is hoped that this will result in a richly populated field of links and references. In

addition to this an online forum is being developed in collaboration with staff and graduate students at Newcastle and Glasgow University (UK), it is hoped that this will be a rich source of exchange, and that students (and staff) from all institutions will post work in progress and comment upon each others work. These online/discursive elements will feed into a short written reflection, which is submitted towards the end of the seminar.

It is possible to navigate this seminar using a variety of software/hardware systems (Ableton Live, Max, pd, turntables, home-brew electronics, etc); and a diverse approach to a variety of technologies is highly encouraged!

**Assessment:**

Online/in class participation: 20%

Mid-term concert (23<sup>rd</sup> of October in Granoff Studio 1): 20%

Reflective writing: 20%

Final concert (14<sup>th</sup> of December in Grant): 40%