

# TEACHING STATEMENT

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I believe that teaching is the act of co-constructing knowledge. Whether teaching composition, programming, or humanities courses, my approach is the same: I create a space where students can explore topics through vulnerability and difference. I believe that the best way for students to learn is to begin to understand how to develop practices. I approach this not only through exercises, but by exposing my own practice and letting it be affected by the production of knowledge throughout the course.

While at UC Berkeley, I was hired as a lecturer to teach the undergraduate course in **Composition**, and the following year, I taught composition as a visiting professor at Northeastern University in addition to mentoring twelve private composition students. My approach to composition is rooted in my practice as a composer, indeed, I view teaching composition as part of my practice. When I teach, I propose that composition is a physical act of doing and making that is entangled with every aspect of one's life and that is always underway even when one feels most removed from it.

I believe strongly that resisting the kind of stagnation that comes from comfort and familiarity is a practice in itself, and I make destabilizing practices an important part of my encounters with students. This typically involves the introduction of constraints as interventions in compositional process.

While at Northeastern University, I designed and developed a course on the topic of **Random Processes for Composers and Electronic Music**. While the course was primarily a practical, hands-on introduction to random processes, it began with a critical introduction to the use of randomness in music, designed to interrogate and destabilize assumptions that randomness in music is or is not *a priori* interesting. This introductory unit, which included a variety of readings, listening, discussion, and even a "recomposition" exercise in which the students reconstructed one of Iannis Xenakis' techniques from a description in *Formalized Music*, was designed not only to provide context for the course, but to collectively establish a shared value system with respect to the topic at hand. The goal I achieved was the establishment of a community of practitioners for whom the the topics of the course were seen as tools they need in order to accomplish their work.

This need to construct a community in order to approach a topic has been a theme in my teaching and comes, at least in part, from years of teaching the advanced portion of the **CNMAT Max/MSP Summer Workshop**, a week-long immersive introduction to media/arts programming using Max/MSP, as well as a course called **Math and Media** at the California College of the Arts. In both cases, the interests and disciplinary training of the participants was always exceptionally diverse. From glass blowers to performance artists, weavers, sculptors, and jewelry makers to composers, the diversity of knowledge and know-how represented in these courses was staggering, and had to be cared for. The important thing for me to remember during those courses was that everyone was out of their element, including me.

In the case of the CNMAT workshop, the age and experience level of the group was typically higher than that of CCA which was made up of undergrads. This meant that with the former, I could teach from my own expertise and trust them to make the necessary connections to their own disciplines, while with the latter, I had to more explicitly manage the opportunities for them to make those connections. One strategy for this was to engage the students in a situated critical analysis of their own work, as well as the work of other artists they admired, from the frame of reference of one or more of the topics of the course. The idea was to ask them to view the world through a particular lens, and to present that view to the rest of the class so that we could all see what it helped illuminate.

In these classes, I taught by demonstrating as much as possible, mainly through live-coding examples and programs from scratch. This let the students see and hear me work through problems, back out

of mistakes, and break down the distinction between “actual” work that we care about and invest in, and assignments done for the benefit of the course. We would build up a problem to work on together, and on a number of occasions, students would continue to use those materials as the basis for continued work of their own.

My recent pedagogical work, in collaboration with choreographer Teoma Naccarato, has taken these ideas of community building, intervention, and critical discourse further. Using techniques we developed during the month long creation of *III:tangente* (see my CV and Research Statement), Naccarato and I co-facilitated a three day workshop on **Intersections in Music, Movement, and Technology** at CNMAT, which foregrounded the practice of critically appropriating technology as a generative intervention in creative practice. This workshop, which ran for 8-10 hours each day, included collaborative work, discussion, and destabilizing exercises intended to bring awareness to those aspects of both technology and one’s own creative practice that have become invisible due to their familiarity. As facilitators of the workshop, we often employed the methods we were teaching as pedagogical devices, allowing the discourse of the group to blur the lines between participants and facilitators. I found this approach hugely productive and will continue to develop it going forward.

In closing, I view my ability to engage and be vulnerable with my students to be one of my greatest assets as a teacher. I ask a lot of my students, but nothing I don’t ask of myself. I lead by example. These strategies are well-suited to disciplines such as composition, but also give me a unique approach to teaching topics in technology and programming.