

Cross-Disciplinary Learning and Teaching Initiative Performance Studies Workshop

Summer 2011

Final Report

Workshop participants

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Workshop description: Performance Studies

In the 1950s and 60s, performance art in its contemporary form emerged in the West as an artistic genre composed of diverse performative acts combining different types of visual media and live drama in order to eradicate the so-called fourth wall between the actors on stage and the audience. Performance art today is defined as a politically-charged genre through which practitioners use their own bodies as the medium or object to express their artistic vision and message. Performance art, however, is not a solely Western art form nor was it “invented” in the twentieth century. The genre has a rich global tradition that spans cultures, languages, geographies, and historical periods. Recent scholarly research traces the diverse and multicultural roots of performance art through a variety of disciplinary perspectives combining the tools of literary, visual, performative, political, and ethnographic research.

The goal of this cross-disciplinary faculty workshop was to first familiarize participants with theories about performance art, its rich and multicultural history, and contemporary cross-disciplinary approaches to its study; and second, to study a set of innovative contemporary performance artists whose work spans the Western Hemisphere and promotes a transnational North/South dialogue within the Americas. After completing this workshop, participants should be able to incorporate performance art and theory into their teaching at Whitman and future scholarship.

Final workshop syllabus

Week 1

- Carlson, Marvin A., *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, (Second Edition, Routledge, 2003), ISBN-10: 0415299276
- Fusco, Coco, *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*, (New Press, 1995), ISBN-10: 1565842456
- Jones, Amelia, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1998), ISBN-10: 0816627738

Week 2

Video performances

- *Border brujo*, Guillermo Gómez-Peña
- *The Couple in the Cage*, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña
- *Mambo Mouth*, John Leguizamo

Readings

- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo, "Border Brujo." p. 75-95 in *Warrior for Gringostroika: Essays, Performance Texts, and Poetry*. Introduction by Roger Bartra. Saint Paul: Greywolf Press, 1993.
- Leguizamo, John, *Mambo Mouth: A Savage Comedy by John Leguizamo*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993.
- Román, David. "Latino Performance and Identity." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*. 22:2 (Fall 1997): 151-167.

Week 3

- Kwon, Miwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Location Identity*, (MIT Press, 2004), ISBN-10: 026261202X
- Jackson, Shannon, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, (Routledge, 2011), ISBN-10: 0415486017
- Reinelt, Janelle G. and Joseph Roach, Editors, *Critical Theory and Performance: Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Theater: Theory/Text/Performance), (University of Michigan Press, 2007), ISBN-10: 047206886

Week 4

Video performances

- *OR*, Dumb Type
- *Superman, Mach 20*, and other excerpts, Laurie Anderson
- *El Gringo (Very Angry Dogs)*, Francis Alys
- *TRANSFINITE*, Ryoji Ikeda

Readings

- Dixon, Steve, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*, (MIT Press, 2007), ISBN-10: 0262042355
- Faesler, Carla, "Francis Alys," *BOMB*. 116 (Summer 2011)
<http://bombsite.com/issues/116/articles/5109>
- Salter, Chris, *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance*, (MIT Press, 2010), ISBN-10: 0262195887

Week 5

- Carr, C., *On Edge: Performance at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Revised Edition, (Wesleyan, 2008), ISBN-10: 0819568880
- Cohen-Cruz, Jan, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (Rutgers Series on the Public Life of the Arts), (Rutgers Press, 2005), ISBN-10: 0813535506

Week 6

- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo and Roberto Sifuentes, *Exercises for Rebel Artists: Radical Performance Pedagogy*, (Routledge, 2011), ISBN-10: 041554923X

The workshop participants met a total of six times during the months of July and August 2011. Each meeting lasted three hours, which included discussion of the texts, viewing of recorded performances and videos (on Weeks 2 and 4), and discussions of the themes and topics as they related to cross-disciplinary teaching and pedagogy.

Changes from the proposed syllabus were mainly three. One, a reading from the syllabus was eliminated to accommodate other readings (we did not read Koppers, Petra, *The Scar of Visibility: Medical Performances and Contemporary Art*). Two, we modified the specific performance artists, videos, and recorded performances studied during the workshop to allow all members to select artists they were going to be teaching. And three, the participants opted not to go to Portland to see the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, instead choosing to meet in Walla Walla for the duration of the workshop.

Selected comments from workshop participants:

Janis Breckenridge

This past summer (2011) I participated in a Cross-Disciplinary Learning and Teaching Initiative Workshop: Performance Art Studies. Over the course of several weeks, faculty from the Spanish Department and Studio Art (myself, Nohemy Solórzano-Thompson, Justin Lincoln, MaLynda Poulsen) read about the historical development of performance and performance studies, discussed various theoretical approaches to the topic, critiqued a wide range of performance pieces from the 1960s to the present, and considered the impact of technology and social media (youtube, facebook, iphone apps) upon future development of performance art.

For me personally, the workshop's success can be measured several ways. First, the working group fostered creative inquiry and collaboration across departments and disciplines in a way that complements my own teaching and research pursuits. In addition to getting to work with colleagues with whom I otherwise do not come into frequent contact, the content of our workshop will impact my current course offerings in important ways. Specifically, through this workshop I was introduced to video performance art that I plan to incorporate into my Spanish 320 (*Reel Dialogues: Language, Conversation,*

Introduction to Film Analysis) course. Francis Alys' performative piece, "El Gringo," is a short that can provide an in-classroom exercise for examining the use and effect of specific filming technique (camera angle, sound and silence, cuts, framing), directorial control and intent, and the very nature of "performance." Similarly, the controversial performative work "The Couple in the Cage" (Guillermo Gómez -Peña and Coco Fusco) will make a valuable addition to a unit on ethnic and cultural identity in my Spanish 343 course (*Critical Thinking and Academic Writing: Fiction/Essay/Literary Criticism*). The piece challenges basic assumptions regarding the notion of identity as well as the performance and exhibition (not to mention consumption or commodification) of race, culture, and ethnicity.

Malynda Jones-Poulsen

Over the six weeks of the CDLTI performance art workshop, two members from both the Whitman Art department and the Whitman Spanish department met to discuss the use of performance art in both a liberal arts education and also in our own pedagogical practices. It was an amazing opportunity to draw connection between our varied areas of study with comprehensive discussions.

Professor Breckenridge led a particularly memorable discussion about her "visit" to the torture camps of the Argentinean "Disappeared". The guides were adamant that it was a "visit" and not a "tour". The visit was literally a performance and the visitors were talked to as if they had been swept up amongst the "The Disappeared" and were being led through the process of their own eventual demise. The cross-disciplinary dialog about this performance and its' presentation facilitated secondary discussion about intended audiences, the art of representation, memorials, and the relational aspect of context.

Having an understanding of another department's use of the same readings to address substantive issues from alternative perspectives expands and enriches the potential learning experience of students. Within my own teaching, I plan to utilize the essays about social art and also site specific art as examples of art as a vehicle for change. The challenge for my students will be to define an intended audience or community and propose a project that addresses a social or site-specific issue.

Justin Lincoln

The interdisciplinary Performance Art Reading group was the third interdisciplinary group project I was involved with this year. It was quite different from both the Computational Thinking and the Global Studies workshops in very informative ways.

The biggest discernible difference was in the make-up of the group members. This group consisted of two members of the Spanish Department and two members of the Studio Art Department. This parity was a refreshing change. However, a wider range of disciplinary perspectives would have also been quite interesting in the context of the reading

materials.

Another difference that was both striking and enjoyable was the informality of the meeting structure. Our weekly meetings corresponded with lunch at a cafe and led to an open arena for discussion. I felt like I got to know the members of this group in a very different atmosphere and method.

This workshop involved the use of the most varied and encompassing number of texts out of all the groups with which I was involved. This led to a great survey of current literature on the subject of Performance Art. This allowed for a means of evaluating the relative merit of many academic sources and materials. At the same time, it was also clear that even the extensive reading list only touched the tip of the proverbial iceberg in terms of the subject.

Finally, the last difference in this group was how immediately applicable some of the ideas were for my classes. In particular I used a live performance as both an ice-breaker and a first assignment in my Beginning New Genres class this semester. The effect on the students was particularly noteworthy, memorable, and constructive.

Kudos to Nohemy Solórzano-Thompson for suggesting and leading such an enjoyable and informative group. It was a nice means of gearing up for the academic semester and a wonderful way to connect with faculty outside of our departments.

Nohemy Solórzano-Thompson

I proposed this workshop based on my research interests in US Latina/o and Latin American performance art and because of my teaching of a new Spanish 300-level survey course that includes performance (Spanish 341: *Critical Thinking and Academic Writing: Media/Theatre/Performance*). I taught the Spanish 341 course for the first time in fall 2010 and will teach it again after my sabbatical in spring 2012.

The composition of the group (two Spanish professors and two from Studio Art) enhanced the workshop's goals, as the parity of disciplinary-training coupled with our own interdisciplinary background and interests created a fascinating dialogue about how to teach performance art from multiple perspectives. As this was one few times I had interacted with members of the Studio Art faculty, I learned a lot about their own pedagogies and scholarly interests. I especially appreciated our conversations about the type of assignments regularly required from students in Studio Art and their subsequent assessment by the faculty. We also discussed how theses in their department are structured and how critical thinking skills are incorporated into their program.

The scheduling of the workshop during the summer allowed participants to meet weekly for intensive meetings (three hours each) that facilitated in-depth discussion of the texts, their pedagogical applications, and possible future areas for research. Meeting downtown

at a café helped the participants feel comfortable and also allowed us to have snacks, which ensured we were able to meet for the whole time.

Overall, participating in the workshop allowed me to become more familiar with cross-disciplinary approaches to the study and teaching of performance art. Thanks to the discussions with colleagues and the material we studied, I will revise my Spanish 341 syllabus for spring 2012 in order to incorporate more interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to performance studies. One of the changes I will make to my syllabus thanks to the workshop is the inclusion of more video art (not only recorded performances) in order to introduce the students to different genres of performance art.

One of the most useful aspects of this workshop was our ongoing discussion about theory and its inclusion in an undergraduate course. In my teaching, I integrate theoretical readings and concepts regularly, as students need a firm theoretical background. The workshop discussions and comments from my colleagues helped me think critically about how to better integrate theory into my teaching.

Another subject we discussed was the possibility of co-teaching courses in the future with Studio Art faculty. Although we did not develop a specific proposal (especially as departmental concerns prevent us from doing this in the near future), the possibility was an exciting option we would like to explore in the years to come.

The cross-disciplinary learning and teaching initiative workshops are a great opportunity for faculty members across campus to meet to share and develop new pedagogies from multiple perspectives and disciplines. It was a great experience to participate in this workshop and I hope that it will lead to other interdisciplinary opportunities in the future.