

# **NWPL Performance Ecology Workshop in Italy Summer 2014 An International Educational Experience (IEE) Proposal**

## Program Rationale

### Core Criteria 1: Intellectually meaningful and clearly advances the students' work within the discipline and/or progress toward graduation

The work of the NWPL Performance Ecology Workshop in Italy Summer 2014 will be embedded in the Theatre Program course 7800: 490/590 Workshop in Theatre Arts (3 credits), fulfilling requirements in the theatre major TAG or serving as an elective for majors, minors, or students from other disciplines.

The IEE will develop in the following manner:

Session 1: Initial work will be held in residence at Cenci Casa-laboratorio, outside of Amelia in the countryside and hills of Umbria. NWPL co-artistic directors Jairo Cuesta (instructor, Case Western Reserve University) and James Slowiak (professor, The University of Akron) will lead an international group of students, teachers, and performers in daily work sessions of 8 hours/day for five days. The workshop content will consist of basic elements of theatre craft and creative training techniques: (1) physical exercises, voice work, attention and perception, precision and flow, seeing, listening, meeting and memory; (2) collective or individual exercises in coordination, rhythm, and untaming, space awareness (both indoors and outdoors), singing and dancing; and (3) The Rendering (improvisation), a structured flow of detailed actions and exercises organized in a creative montage that serves to reclaim the performer's vital forces and capacity for contact. The intention of this initial work is to give the participant a foundation in the ethics, principles, and basic techniques of performance creation.

Session 2: The Urban Landscape: Tuscany and Rome

Following the work in Umbria, the group will relocate to the urban landscapes of Florence and Rome. Here The University of Akron students, under the guidance of Professor Slowiak, will continue the Performance Ecology work utilizing the techniques learned to encounter the churches, museums, marketplaces, and art of Tuscany and Rome and "see, hear, and meet" this landscape as a performer. The primary material of theatre as social practice is person-to-person exchange, interaction, or participation. How the student performer engages with an urban landscape can involve various media including photography, video, drawing, text, sound, music, storytelling, sculpture, action, and performance. Within the performance making process, the Performance Ecology practice in the urban landscape will emphasize people in relationships to each other and their surroundings, focusing on engagement and accountability between the community and the artist. How does a community create its art? How does art influence the community?

Students will also participate in master classes and attend performances at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards and with other Italian theatre companies, such as Teatro Natura, a group that performs classic plays in site specific environments. Possible excursions to Siena and Pisa.

Session 3 (optional): Back to the Sources: Sardinia. This work session will involve an intensive collaboration with the Sardinia-based group Lupo Bianco at a former convent outside the city of Sassari. Students will engage with the actors to begin a long-term project of devising a performance inspired by the mythology and landscape of Sardinia.

This program will allow students to work creatively and intensively on their craft in several highly stimulating environments with a diverse group of committed learners. New World Performance Laboratory has designed its primary research program, Performance Ecology, around the rudimentary performative elements concerning one's humanness and relationship with the physical world. As we enter the post-human age of high technology and globalization, Jairo Cuesta and James Slowiak have organized various aspects of their respective research into a flow of detailed exercises (individual and collective, songs, dances, texts, and creative work) that serve to reclaim the human being's vital forces and capacity for contact.

Performance Ecology is an attempt to rediscover the urge to act. As the participant struggles to remember, to reveal, to accomplish or to create, he/she fights for mastery of the body and voice, vitality and purpose. Participants express themselves in patterns of voice and movement whose tension, composition and energy uncover a unique and untamed power and precision. **Performance Ecology** seeks to liberate the dormant energy and creative impulses in the participant/performer, in solitude or in company, with the space or with the partner.

**Performance Ecology** might be looked at as an example of what cultural historian Morris Berman calls the monastic option: embodied knowledge which can serve as a counterweight to the world of schlock, ignorance, social inequality, and mass consumerism. Berman believes that if this embodied knowledge, authentic ways of living, can be preserved and passed down then our cultural heritage may well serve as a seed for a subsequent renaissance, a New Enlightenment. What better place to seek a new Renaissance than in the cradle of the original Renaissance—Italy?

Cenci Casa-laboratorio has a long history of hosting diverse educational activities. Cuesta and Slowiak have been major contributors to Cenci's offerings and leaders of work sessions for more than 25 years. The workshop leaders also have strong connections with other theatre practitioners and master teachers in Italy who can contribute to this program.

#### Assessing Program Learning Outcomes and Curriculum Integration

Famed director Peter Brook says, "Theater is not just a place, not simply a profession. It is a metaphor. It helps to make the process of life more clear."

The real potential of theatre studies in the academy seems often to be overlooked. Pandering to popular taste and box office appeal has become the rule on many college campuses, despite the fact that university performing arts programs have a very different mission than commercial professional theatre and the possibility to operate under very different conditions.

Television shows like *Glee!* and *Smash!* haven't done the field any favors either. While these series may be entertaining and may even be influencing social beliefs by taking on such topics as same-sex relationships, bullying, and homelessness, the fact remains that a new generation of students and audience members is being indoctrinated in the age-old clichés of the theatre as a frivolous, ego-driven profession, instead of being exposed to the **potential of performance as a necessary force of change in society and a vehicle to deepen understanding and appreciation of global diversity (Criteria 2).**

The Performance Ecology Workshop in Italy Summer 2014 is an example of eco-theatre, rather than ego-theatre. This work stresses collaboration and, while it seemingly lies outside the boundaries of conventional theatre, it is work that will influence the student's participation in all kinds of social and creative research and community activism. Training actors for the 21st century must be about training human beings to thrive in their communities. **(Criteria 5).**

The **cross-disciplinary** learning outcomes for NWPL's Performance Ecology Workshop Summer 2014 touch upon the three main points of (1) critical thinking and problem solving, (2) social practice and artistic expression, and (3) collaboration and engagement. **The learning outcomes can also be linked to the five pathways of success in UA's Vision 2020. (Criteria 2, 3)**

Upon completion of NWPL's Performance Ecology Workshop Summer 2014, the student should be able to:

- ✦ **Think** in an interdisciplinary way, drawing on holistic, critical and connective models of analysis., especially Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process.
- ✦ **Discuss** a variety of artistic and performance forms.
- ✦ **Investigate** relationships among techniques of performance and various performance theories and practitioners.
- ✦ **Comprehend** how identity and cultural and geographical/architectural spaces are constructed and operate on the performer and the spectator.
- ✦ **Recognize and evaluate** critical, social, and aesthetic issues especially in a culture different from one's own.
- ✦ **Apply** aesthetic judgment, perceptual sensitivity, and critical thinking skills to the wide range of ways the arts impact community, global, and social change.
- ✦ **Employ** performative tools to negotiate a variety of situations, including issues of difference and conflict.
- ✦ **Effectively communicate and address** issues of globalization, race and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class, especially in multi-cultural environments.

- ✦ **Understand and use** performative art (embodied knowledge) as the site and process for critical, cultural, and historical understandings.
- ✦ **Work collaboratively** to execute specific performance structures.
- ✦ **Present** skills and knowledge as a performance practitioner in a professional format in one's own community.

At each moment during NWPL's Performance Ecology Workshop Summer 2014, students will engage in activities to learn about art, about culture, and about social practice in search of ways they intersect in various landscapes, communities, and cultures. NWPL's Performance Ecology Workshop will enhance the climate of the School of Dance, Theatre, and Arts Administration, The University of Akron, and Akron itself by expanding the students' arsenal of tools to navigate today's diverse, global world and build an awareness of theatre as a form of social practice. This program could become an integral part of The Akron Experience! **(Criteria 3)** But students will also learn about themselves. And what a discovery that is! That's the real basis for Student Success and the key to unlocking a community's growth. Eco art, not ego art.

**Assessment** will occur in the following manners: 1) students will keep a journal of their experience that will be graded; 2) students will be graded on their daily participation in exercises, group work, master classes, and performance creation; 3) students will write a reflective paper about their work, discoveries, and how the experience can be applied to their particular field of study; 4) students will be asked to make a performative presentation about their experience in Fall 2013 to other students, staff, and faculty. **(Criteria 2, 5)**

### Eligibility and Recruitment of Students

All UA undergraduate and graduate students are eligible with a GPA of 2.5. Preference will be given to theatre and dance majors and theatre/arts administration graduate students. This program may also appeal to students in music, art, education and the social sciences. Students will also be recruited from other area colleges and universities. In the future, with lead time for marketing, this program could attract many students from other universities. Slowiak and Cuesta's workshops in Italy have attracted participants from France, Spain, Eastern Europe, the UK, and South America. In the past, the workshop leaders have attracted Ohio students to participate in similar projects with no UA sponsorship or credit. Participation of at least 6 UA students is expected this summer. The maximum is 12. In the future, this number could grow. James Slowiak will recruit students using social media, class announcements, departmental meetings, and university media. Also New World Performance Lab will help in recruitment through other media resources. There is no other such IEE program offered at UA or area universities. The Summer 2013 program included 6 UA students, 1 Kent State student, 1 Case Western Reserve student, and 1 NYU graduate.

## Health and Safety

Cenci Casa-laboratorio ([www.cencicasalab.it](http://www.cencicasalab.it)) is located in Umbria, in the countryside outside of the walled town of Amelia. The complex consists of an old, renovated farmhouse and two new buildings. There are four large rooms with bunk beds and four smaller bedrooms, seven bathrooms with shower and hot water, a large room dining room, two work rooms for music and movement activities, two workspaces outside with wooden flooring, and an outdoor theater. The complex adheres to all health and safety regulations and has been approved for educational activities by the European Community.

In Florence and Rome, the group will stay in two to three star hotels catering to students. In Sardinia, the convent is a registered albergo and retreat center. Hospitals are nearby all facilities. Workshop leaders speak English and Italian and Professor James Slowiak will serve as the 24/7 emergency contact for the program. There are no special health or safety considerations for travel to Italy. Students should be up to date on tetanus shots.

## **Budget (Criteria 4: costs are prudently budgeted and minimal and student costs are reasonable and manageable)**

### Student Cost

Airfare CLE-ROME-CLE	1500.00
Umbria Residential Workshop Fee (food, lodging, bedding, etc.)	500.00
(Sardinia Residential Workshop Fee)	(500.00)
Lodging (Rome and Florence \$60X7nights)	420.00
In-country Travel (trains and buses)	200.00
(Travel to Sardinia)	(200.00)
Food (outside of residential workshop)	300.00
Museum admissions, performances, etc.	150.00
UA tuition	1216.80
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Total Cost for Student	\$4286.80(\$4986.80)
( \$ ) = cost with Sardinia option	

### Faculty Cost

Airfare CLE-ROME-CLE	1500.00
Lodging (Rome and Florence \$70X7 nights)	490.00
In-Country Travel (trains and buses)	200.00
Food (outside of residential workshop \$46 X 7 days)	322.00
Museum admissions, performances, etc.	150.00
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Total Cost for Faculty Member	\$2662.00

UA Cost

Faculty Salary (dependent on number of students enrolled) \$7200