

Ideas for Remote Collaboration: re-thinking exchange and co-authorship across distance and discipline

LESSON PLAN FOR A WORKSHOP

by

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Introduction

These workshop notes are offered to artists interested in working across distances and borders both literal and conceptual; artists collaborating across discipline or cultural affiliation; online border-crossers who envision new creative uses for the transnational highways of the “world wide web” that prioritize dialogue, encounter, and embodiment. This workshop is suitable for (and can be adapted to better accommodate) artists working in and across the mediums of performance/live art, theater, dance, music, street art, installation, photography, film, video and new media.

At the same time that institutional and state funding is disappearing for arts touring and cultural “diplomacy” (particularly in the United States), mobile devices and “selfie” culture are on the rise. In the major industrialized nations, few go anywhere without a miniature computer in their pocket. At this point, most of us have regular access to digital video recorders, email, online file sharing platforms, social media, and web chat services like Skype and Google Hangouts—technologies that allow us to organize and share ideas quickly over long distances. Innovative artists have been employing these and similar technologies for co-creation and collaboration for years, [co-authoring texts over email](#), holding [live online musical jams](#), or [rehearsing a play over Skype](#).

Collaboration across distance, even facilitated by current online communication technologies, may initially present some obvious drawbacks, particularly for body-based art makers: a successful Skype call relies upon a solid internet connection at both ends; online meetings tend to be short, succinct and to the point, in contrast to longer in-studio rehearsals or table meetings; and it’s hard to enjoy an online meal together, or establish that “in the flesh” familiarity that helps break the ice and develop trust. But there are also unique advantages and opportunities inherent to online collaboration, beyond the ability to work with someone whom you could not otherwise access due to geographic or national barriers.

In this workshop, we will use one collaboration structure to explore how we might apply [open source](#) principles to collaborative interdisciplinary performance, so that we maintain an equitable balance of authorship as we co-create, present and distribute content. In the spirit of the commons, we will experiment with offering up our existing material, archive,

or repertoire for elaboration, (de-/re-)construction, and germination of new works by others.

CONSIDER:

1- Remote, online collaboration can aid in the development of networks, facilitate cultural border crossing, and promote solidarity and alliances across distance. It can encourage connection and exchange while maintaining the integrity of separation, allowing collaborators to work with (not against) the political and cultural specificities of each site, addressing their particular community's needs and desires in dialogue with the other site(s).

2- There can be real value in the economy and efficiency of an online collaborative relationship (or "relationship lite") in which collaborators maintain autonomy, positive difference and distance. Projects created remotely may be adapted to multiple venues or presentation mediums (dance theater + dance film + online dance archive + viral video...), and enjoy multiple paths for distribution internationally.

3- There is also the benefit of environmental and financial economy: the minimal carbon footprint of working online; ability to work together without travel funding, etc.

4- This is a critical moment in the culture, in the life and development of the internet, virtual embodiment, and the aforementioned ubiquity of handheld devices and webcams as a cultural phenomenon. We are already making work about it. (This workshop aims to contribute to the robust body of knowledge being produced around the web as site of performance.)

5- Lastly, a provocation: remote online collaboration following open source principles inherently challenge artistic authorship, even suggesting the destruction of the innate value of the material. Employing a "commons" ethos, we might treat our works with less reverence, and give over the rights to (conditionally) over-author our works, as a function of the possibility for decentralization of the collaboration structure. Furthermore, an open sharing principle and resultant dissemination of content can be viewed an alternative (non-monetary, anti-capitalist) currency of exchange.

Workshop preparation

- Ask each participant to bring 3 objects or materials used in prior or current projects, such as masks, blindfolds, ropes, houseplants, fabric, articles of clothing, etc. (These objects will be handled by other participants, so maybe nothing too precious or fragile.)

- Each participant should also bring (or be provided) some kind of video recording device, such as a laptop, tablet, digital camera, or smart phone.

- Other required materials: index cards; pens, markers, or pencils

Part 1:

AUTHORSHIP + EXCHANGE

An interdisciplinary experiment in exchanging artistic concepts, objects and ideas in an economy of minimal control of your Intellectual Property ("IP"), balanced with maximal potential for exchange and re-authorship.

Step 1:

Distribute two **index cards** to each participant. On each card, participants write a couple of sentences describing a current or previous project. This idea will become an OFFERING for someone else to use/transform/destroy/respond. (Thus each participant is offering up two ideas from their personal archive or repertoire.)

Arrange the finished cards on a table, face up, in a single layer so all are visible.

TIP: Be simple and descriptive, conveying the essential idea behind the project, perhaps conveying some basic textures or images that provide an instant impression of the work. It's the essence of the piece, your "elevator blurb," short and sweet.

Some examples of offerings:

"NONSENSICAL PROPAGANDA: Grammatically 'incorrect.' Easily misread. Counterpoint to the public advertising onslaught. Black and white. Clip art aesthetic."

"WITNESS: A piece for one viewer at a time that challenges their limits of engagement by provoking them to get involved in the performance through ethical manipulation and seduction. The viewer leaves the performance considering how much they were willing to take part, and how much they participated unconsciously."

Step 2:

Lay out all the objects and materials on a second table. Invite everyone to check out the cards and objects. Ask each participant to select **one card** and **up to two objects** from the tables. (They should not pick their own.)

Step 3:

Working independently, participants are given 20 minutes to use the idea on the card and one or both of their selected objects to either create an original **short performance** to share with the group OR write a simple **score*** for a performance they would like to make or see made, as a RESPONSE to the offering. That is, this new performance or score is **using the material provided by their peers to author a new work** that explores, develops, critiques, or otherwise spins off of the ideas provided. You only have 20 minutes, so be bold, irreverent, economical, and precise!

*TIP: For the purposes of this exercise, a **good score** would be an idea, provocation, or set of instructions that clearly communicates a performance concept or quality, while allowing for multiple interpretations or approaches, from a range of mediums or practices. An example:

"For single or multiple performance. A source of dripping water and an empty vessel are arranged so that the water falls into the vessel."
-George Brecht, *Drip Music* (1962)

Step 4:

Report back/showing and discussion. One at a time, participants briefly perform, or read their score, and share the offerings/materials they were working with. Talk about how you composed your response performance/score. Share your reactions to seeing your material used by someone else.

Part 2:

EXCHANGE + TECHNOLOGY + THE FRAME

Introduces video/technology to the exchange framework.

Part 2 repeats the general structure of the Exchange exercise, but instead of creating a live performance or score, each participant is asked to perform/record their Response piece as a video. Take a little more time for this task, perhaps 30-45 minutes, but not so much time that folks get lost in complicated editing or elaborate production. Think DIY, handheld, raw footage, selfie, instant video art...

Step 1:

Returning the offerings and objects from Part 1 to the tables, everyone selects a new card and 1-2 new objects.

Step 2:

Independently create your short response video. Pay attention to the frame of the camera, as well as its mobility. Play with (simple) editing.

Step 3:

Group screening. Share the videos, one at a time, or set up multiple viewing stations and allow people to move around the room watching the different pieces as in a gallery. Examine/unpack/discuss.

Consider this structure as a microcosm of a remote collaboration. How might your video fuel the development of a live performance? An online performance? A video performance? An installation?

Variation

Divide the participants into pairs. Each member of the pair offers up their idea cards and objects to their partner only. Create response performances/scores/videos and show them only

to your partner. Then, create a response (video, score, etc) to your partner's response, and so on, until a "performance conversation" unfolds over time.

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MAKING A RESPONSE: some compositional approaches

Ask...

What am I looking at?
What is the idea or concept behind it?
How does it make me feel?
How do I relate to it, from my life or experience?
What is missing? What do I want to see?
What is the next step?
What is being provoked?

Then...

Re-perform
Extract the essence
Do the opposite/compliment/inverse
Refute
Elaborate
Re-contextualize
Translate into a different medium, form, or language

Appendix: Some tools for online collaboration

Video conferencing: Skype, Google Hangouts, FaceTime (for Mac), Tinchat.

There are apps online that allow you to record a video conference call, such as Call Recorder or Wire Tap Studio (for Mac); and Pamela or MP3 Skype Recorder (for Windows).

Video editing: iMovie (fairly basic and easy to use, comes standard with most Mac computers); Final Cut Pro (requires a little more expertise); Adobe Premiere (works across platforms).

Live streaming video: Ustream; YouTube Live Streaming.

Online sharing of content, inspiration, or research: Tumblr, Medium, or Pintrest (for bulletin board or blog-type sharing); Facebook groups (for posting images, videos, and links), or Zotero (geared toward collaborative research).

File sharing: Dropbox is the most popular option, and many people already have at least a free account; upload/download videos using Vimeo, which allows you to password-protect or make private files that you don't want anyone else to see.

NOTE: technology is always changing, and access to devices, applications, and services will vary from country to country. Web research should point you to recent blogs for reviews and tips...and a techie friend or two never hurts!

*Los Angeles based interdisciplinary performance artist **Allison Wyper** activates the performance space as a site of critical action. Engaging subjects such as violence, torture, and moral accountability, she produces charged encounters between performer and viewer that prompt each to consider the possibility for intimate exchange and critical solidarity. She is an Artistic Associate of Guillermo Gómez-Peña's international performance company La Pocha Nostra, collaborator with Hydra Poesis, and performance curator for Project 51's Play the L.A. River. Her work has been seen in the USA, Canada, Australia, and Germany. She has been presented by the ZERO1 Biennial, Performance Studies International, Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, Mountain Standard Time Festival, Congress on Research in Dance, and Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions. allisonwyper.com*

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