

So Much to Do in Such Little Time . . .

Sam Sloan

A group of students buzzes around the table at a local pizza establishment: introductions, family life, year in school, and origin stories. When did you start performing? Last year? This semester! You're still in high school? That excited? This going to be fun! I go last, definitely the oldest student at the table, deciding not to initially disclose my graduate student and facilitator status. Elyse Pineau reminds me that "Performative pedagogy is more than a philosophical orientation or a set of classroom practices. It is a location, a way of situating one's self in relation to students, to colleagues, and to the institutional policies and traditions under which we all labor." As such, "Classrooms are spatial and temporal sites where bodies rub up against one another literally and metaphorically. Despite our best efforts to inhabit that space democratically, our bodies always, already, are molded by our different social and institutional status" (Pineau 130-31).

I introduce myself and my interests briefly, without fanfare, and the students simply reply "that's cool" and continue their conversation. I liked starting this process in that way. My status as facilitator and my years spent studying performance are, at a table like this, just a minor note. I would take a director's role later, helping students to articulate and refine performance choices, but for that meal, for these students, I was just another guy with a shared interest, performance. As such, collectively, we had to make sense of this performance piece.

You Can't Get It All Done

In recent years, I've been enamored with the pedagogical act of restricting time for a given project. It's quite miraculous what can be accomplished in a generative activity, in a given time, with a set of limitations. Try it in your classroom: take an activity that should take an hour and cut it in half, then cut it again. Add in a laundry list of rules, putting any learning goals for the lesson at

Sam Sloan is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in Communication and Theater at Pierce College in Puyallup, Washington. His core research interests involve the intersections of Performance Studies, New Media, and Digital Aesthetics. His website can be found at: SamuelSloan.com.

the top of the list, but alongside no less important rules that might be, say, attending to an everyday life conversation and the sights and sounds of a local neighborhood. Time limitations force students to work in distillation, overcoming the socially imposed aesthetic filters that keep these learners from tapping into a deeper relationship with the wider world.

“But if You Try Sometime,”

This process can be hectic though, and a lot of students don't respond well to the pressure. This is where pedagogues need to be clever about an activity's design. I would encourage performance teachers to always build hooks into these kinds of lessons, cornucopias of modality. Always use the logic of “and, and, and...” In the “My Augusta” project, the activity design tells students to build images and performances based in: sight and sound and photograph and conversation and place and space and speed and flora and fauna and people and group experience and chance and history and tourism. If a student can find just one way into the group project, authoring just one moment or element to the final performance as they embody the choices of other students, they have both engaged the assignment performatively and learned through the embodiment of the rest of the lesson. Seemingly impossible tasks like this assignment start big and scary, but eventually the dam breaks as ideas spill off of the page and into fingers. Legs move into position, and voices articulate texts, soundscapes, people's lives, and their histories.

“You Just Might Find,”

“An important part of our pedagogical expertise is not only the ability to ‘get students up and moving,’ but the skills we have learned that help students reflect upon, discuss, argue, write about, and evaluate their own and others' actions” (133 Pineau). The most important task when moving forward with staging choices in a group performance like this is a kind of constant reflection. It is in the pedagogical space of rehearsal where we get to ask students to reiterate the thesis statement of the performance choice. Wow, this soundscape is beautiful! What does it *mean* to perform this? How does this relate to embodying the space of the river? Can we make it bigger? Can we give it the personality of Augusta? How is the history of the place reflected in the river? How loudly does that duck quack, and how are we going to orchestrate that?

This kind of thesis restatement shouldn't be belabored. Save the analysis, the sense making, for a necessary reflection afterwards. But, by actively encouraging students to embed the purpose of the assignment into each performance choice, we encourage students to build the performance *as* a scholarly argument. Through these, we generate the *reasons* for places, the *meanings* for spaces, and the *arguments* for becoming, for embodiment.

Pineau warns, “This is why I want to distinguish what we do from what others call ‘experiential learning’ and to caution against reducing our pedagogy to a set of exercises or workshops that can be carried easily from classroom to classroom (133). Performance Studies practitioners have the skills to bring to bear the choice of performance text, the text’s argumentation, the text’s historicity, and a vigorous reflection on the performance event itself.

“You Get What You Need”

There’s so much to do in so little time, but time is always a limitation. Time need not be an *excuse* to forgo experimentation and chance encounters with embodied learning. The Augusta ephemera that our group collectively experienced may fade from memory, but the performance choices that made it on the stage—those that were discussed, debated, and articulated specifically—live with us. Those crystallized embodiments that made it into the performance will continue to be remembered, and will serve to construct the city of Augusta for our performers and audiences for years to come. With such interdisciplinary possibility and gravitas in the use of performance as a method, I believe like Pineau that:

If we wish to integrate performance across the curriculum, I believe that we need to advocate the entire pedagogical package in which embodied activities are contextualized within the theoretical arguments that frame them and the institutional discussions that follow. That is performative pedagogy; the rest is just teaching tips (133).

Work Cited

Pineau, Elyse. “Performance Studies Across the Curriculum: Problems, Possibilities, and Projections.” *The Future of Performance Studies: Vision and Revisions*. Ed. Sheron Dailey. Washington D.C.: National Communication Association P, 1998. 128-35. Print.



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