

Performance in the wake | Cuerpas ante lo político. An introduction

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This special issue of *Liminalities*, “Performance in the Wake | Cuerpas ante lo político,” is a work in progress and in motion. Its introductory essay is a collaboration of the four authors, who also co-edited the issue. Coming as we do from different disciplinary backgrounds, creative, and conceptual practices, we conjugate an array of different discourses in this introductory essay. This introduction is also the result of entangled and transversal dialogues that have taken place while editing the issue and over two years of Performance in the Wake. It is a method of collaboration which we have, however informally, made our own, in which convergences are knitted together and yet left susceptible for future openings and rearticulations. This special issue is one register of an ongoing process of collaboration among editors and contributors, to which interested practitioners, readers, and thinkers are warmly invited to join. We hope that this tangled writing in itself enacts some of the challenges that have arisen in researching and thinking together about/from the intersections between performance, politics, and Ibero America and the Caribbean.

During two years, the research group Performance in the Wake of the Political proposed to attune academic listening to performance practices immersed in political mobilizations in the region in recent years as well as contaminate academic understandings of them by studying, inviting and working together with contemporary performance artists. Through a series of academic and non-academic encounters, the research group embarked upon an open conversation about performance in the wake of the political. Our public events started in the 2020

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Fall quarter, with a cycle of talks that thematized spatial performances of the border, performance, memory, and public space. In October, we invited the choreographer Minerva Tapia to think (about) the border through dance, the choreography at the border, or—borrowing her own words—through “danza fronteriza” (border dance). In this event, moderated by Professor Martha Torres Méndez, we explored “border-thought,” that is, the border as an ontological, epistemological, and performative concept that both constructs and is constructed through our experiences of space. In our second event, moderated by Ana Baginski, artist Minerva Cuevas and academic and playwright Sandra Noeth discussed borders as political spaces and territories as well as borders traversing bodies—from the quotidian border crosser in Tapia, to the embodied border in Cuevas (“Bridging Borders,” 2004) and their social choreographies (Noeth 2019). Through Cuevas’ conceptual art and Noeth’s dramaturgical scholarship, we contemplated how performance and interventions into public space allow us to (re)think spaces such as borders, urban spaces, and museums. For Baginski, this type of performances is related to surveillance and consumption. Their article, also focusing on the context of the US/Mexico border, explores contemporary interpretations of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* through the lens of Latin American thinkers and artists, including Cuevas. Finally, in December, we had a roundtable with the project *We Must Be Far Away* and Paula Calavera. *We Must Be Far Away* explores the cartography of memory, that is, the affects and emotions of migration, focusing on the Venezuelan diaspora. Calavera talked to us about her urban art, both in its institutional and a-legal expression, and the politics of urban art and public space. Palencia Gutiérrez and Calavera further discussed these issues in an *a posteriori* interview, included in this issue. The interview derives from Calavera’s public art performance—that is, her painting of public spaces—to explore possibilities of spatial belonging outside of (institutional) surveillance and consumption.

Between the border-thought focused on in Fall and the intermedial feminist*¹ mobilizations engaged in Spring, in Winter a transitional space was opened spanning *We Must Be Far Away*, a project of artists Verónica Aponte, Elena Cardona, Fabiola Ferrero, Nina Rancel, and María Ríos-Mathioudakis, to artist Adriana Rondón-Rivero, and finally choreographer and scholar Vanessa Vargas. We heard how these Venezuelan women artists work on ways of making heard and audible that which is elusive to narrative or dramatic treatment (Rondón Rivero and Cardona in this issue, Acosta López 2017); how they share and gather Venezuela no longer as a territory but as a state of being, an “estado de ánimo” (Ferrero

¹ Following collectives like Ni Una Menos and Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, we think feminism* such that it includes not only people identified as women at birth, but also feminized bodies and those who identify as women. The asterisk draws attention to this still contested site of inclusion.

in this issue) across the scattered, global diaspora as well as across the social distance of the pandemic—Rondón Rivero’s powerful 2020 collaborative and virtual performance, “Trenzar una a una nuestras historias de mujeres migrantes,” for instance, discussed in Cardona’s article for this issue, weaves a communal web across the different screens on which women in the Venezuelan diaspora were refracted. In these artists and thinkers of different genres and disciplines, the performative is harnessed as a mode of gathering something distant or diasporic, be it in the “archivo de archivos, abierto desde su interior, y susceptible de transformación,”² which Cardona writes of in this issue, or be it in the migrant’s performative body and her “expanded writing” in Vanessa Vargas’ work (2016, also cf. Noeth 2019).

In Spring, we invited speakers from two feminist* collectives: the Colectiva Feminista en Construcción from Puerto Rico and Ni Una Menos from Argentina. With the moderation of Mell Rivera Díaz and Rocío Zambrano, Shariana Ferrer-Nuñez and Zoan Tanís Dávila Roldán spoke to us about their campaign, successful in early 2021, to declare a state of emergency because of femicides on the island, an inherently performative campaign in its remarkable capacity to change the terms of the debate on emergency, the allocation of funds and priorities. Performance was also crucial to the Colectiva’s mobilizing power and participative choreographies of women’s* bodies moving through San Juan, bank buildings, or government institutions. Ni Una Menos had also scored a success not long before our conversation, with the legalization of abortion by the Argentinean congress in December 2020. With scholars and activists Paola Cortes Rocca and Cecilia Palmeiro, Erin Graff Zivin and Gwendolen Pare moderated a conversation about the role of the performative in mobilizations of Ni Una Menos. Cortes Rocca and Palmeiro discuss “#OperaciónAraña” (Operation Spider) in their article for this issue. The Puerto Rican and Argentinean campaigns are performative in Cortes Rocca’s sense of residuality and emergency according to which they are “figuras de cierre y también figuras anticipatorias de un nuevo estado de lo decible y lo escuchable” (2021).³

As the last phase of our public program anticipated, this special issue too interacts with the above two important feminist* movements that make the earth tremble in and beyond the hemisphere. The articles by Cortes Rocca, Palmeiro, and Rivera Díaz attend to how these movements reframe the political, subjecting the political to “la maraña” (the tangle) in Rivera Díaz’s words or an arachnid method, in the words of Marie Bardet, Cortes Rocca and Palmeiro. As the articles show, the movements revise the political from collective, performative practices

² Trans: “archive of archives, open from inside, and capable of transformation” (Cardona).

³ Trans: “figures of closure and anticipatory figures of a new condition of the sayable and audible” (Pare).

which subject words, concepts, sexed and racialized bodies to a bodily, yet iterative and revisable experimentation. This alters the scene of the political, making other practices tangible and possible.

In this special issue and in Performance in the Wake's research, we have also drawn attention to how these salient feminist* movements are themselves enmeshed in a broader web of aesthetic experimentation. We can see such experimentations in Cecilia Vicuña's use of threads and textiles as part of a poetic gesture that tangles bodies in the entwined and hand-crafted processes of weaving and writing. Rondon-Rivero's poetic actions similarly weave threads, voices, and images into emergent experiences of a/the common, where sorority and sonority join in spaces for listening. This web is weaved and criss-crossed by women's public-political interventions, whether they are (organized as) feminists* or not. Our collaborative work and the articles in this special issue emphasize that the experiential qualities of intervention modifies both the political and performance in a two-pronged way: On the one hand, the poetic in performance appears in different ways in the articles and in the works they engage with. The poetic emerges both as an elusive space-time which resists normative orders and finds creative forces of action. On the other hand, the collaborative and collective enactment of the works we study amounts to a peculiar *mise-en-scène* of the feminized body in the wake of the political—doing so in intimate as well as in collective and avant-gardist practices. Although we go on to introduce the articles according to these two modifications of the political through performance, the body of the special issue will trouble any hermeneutic distinction between the two. The articles discuss performances that partake in its interleaved poetic *and* collectivizing powers.

Like the wake, the common focal point of the poetic transits and moves through many of the articles of this special issue. Here, we approach the poetic in performance. The poetic is elusive, it creates resistance to the closure and fixity of signs, it remains at the limit of its own definition, it remakes itself to the extent that it performs. Instead of defining what is poetic, we frame it as a mode of doing that produces a type of experience in its moment of emergence. The poetic, in that sense, far from being identified beforehand as a prescriptive thing, comes into being in the moment that it interpolates us, that is enacted in its incompleteness. In the poetic we can recognize, for example, elements, gestures, objects, and bodies that do things and move along in the activities of everyday life and encounter in them alternative modes of being-with in different spheres of life. What we consider to be poetic in performance is what is processual in its occurrence, rather than a definitive thing that aims for closure or completeness. Far from a feeling of the poets, artists, or performers exteriorized, rather than an object that is produced as an isolated thing, the poetic emerges in a relationality between both. This relational dimension allows for an emphasis on the process as an oscillation between doing and undoing. In-between these movements, the poetic appears as an action within the performance that resembles a movement that transits, as Diana

Taylor suggests, “across temporalities, while simultaneously captures the now of its awakening” (7) and weaves a common thread. The poetic thus occurs, rather than situates, in its production and reception.

If performance, as framed by Taylor, is an avant-gardist movement that comes from the 1960’s in which artists have used their bodies to challenge regimes of power and social norms (7), we could now say that performance’s avant-gardism, in light of Cortes Rocca and Palmeiro’s article, is today much more (a) feminist* (one) in that it relies on a collective power of creation (2022 11). This power is also the poetic in performance. The articles in this issue engage with the poetic in diverse ways.

Vergara’s article analyzes Vicuña’s poetry and performance as two acts that are intertwined and exposed in weaving and writing. The poetic emerges, Vergara argues, when weaving and writing keep gestating each other in an interdependent relationship that sets the basis for a communal reliance. From the constant weaving and unweaving of words and threads, performance appears as an action that challenges both permanence and disappearance, where the poetic emerges both from a place of indeterminacy and as a life force of what remains.

Oscillating between interview and essay, Cardona’s article creates a dialogue among photographers and artists Aponte, Ferrero, and Rondón-Rivero. With them Cardona suggests a “thought in process” and writes collaboratively about the experience of migration and what she calls the performativity of memories. In Cardona’s article, the poetic can be conceived as a mode of doing that aims for communal healing, without leaving the vulnerable space of the body and its experience of migration. Photography, poetry, and digital media are places of actions and affects where words, sounds, and images reverberate while they perform in interruptions. Such temporal qualities produce future memories that resist officiality and its mechanisms of fixation and erasure.

Cortes-Rocca and Palmeiro focus on the performative action #OperaciónAraña (Operation Spider) conceived by the Ni Una Menos collective in Argentina and co-organized with the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion and women from the Subway Workers Trade Union, together with more than seventy feminist* groups. In their article, the poetic weaves “an apparatus of intelligibility” (2022 14), that is activated performatively by an avant-garde from below. As such, the feminist* poetic becomes a device of reading and reordering—the library, the archive and the world—oriented toward the transformation of experiences, bodies, and languages.

Baginski, on the other hand, focuses on the performative condition of border spaces and discursive edges as “a kind of performance site, which produces bodily and interpersonal experiences” (2022 2) that challenge dominant ideologies around race, gender, and national identity. In Baginski’s article, the poetic and the performative are enmeshed, not only because they consider Wendy Treviño’s

poetic work at the performance site which is the border. Moreover, in their analysis, contested and policed identities as are race, gender, and nationality, become poetic: they are revisable, interrupted, and emergent. This analysis builds on Anzaldúa's border thought, precisely in the midst of the ambivalent reception Anzaldúa's recent re-edition and homages have produced. Approaching the border and its ensuant identities as unstable from the poetic and the performative, Baginski is able to defend the productiveness of Anzaldúa's work against new claims to presence and authenticity.

Rivera Diaz revisits Puerto Rican history in the present. He focuses on the *Colectiva Feminista en Construcción* and how the "consignas" (the slogans) generated from this political space have constructed contestatory ways of organizing the common. In this article, the poetic revolves around the idea of what is "in construction" and emphasizes the slogans as a performative strategy. Leaning on Puerto Rican scholar Mara Negrón, Rivera Díaz fashions an entangled essay in which the poetic "nos compete a todos en tanto que sujetos que debemos ser testigos de nuestra era" (Negrón 2010).⁴

The poetic takes several forms in this issue. By considering the poetic as reiterative, repetitive acts that carry with them their own interruptions, we could say that the poetic task allows us to perform affects and disturbances in the distribution of the sensible. As such, the poetic is related with the political, if we understand the political as a configuration of the field of experience and the distribution of rights, bodies, subjectivities and desires, both in the social sphere and in the order of the unconscious (Rolnik 2019). In turn, the poetic consists in finding ways to interrupt that ordering of reality with other ways of feeling, perceiving, and imagining the present and to transform the expectation of future.

Traversing the order of words and the order of bodies, that encrypt the capacity for enunciation and action in every field of experience, the poetic erupts in performances when it produces tensions among these two regimes. By making the enunciation, the performances become action: mobilizing and generating other experiences of understanding, that influence reality, and perform other frames of meaning for political participation in the contestatory agenda in the street as well as in the small daily actions that reorganize the sense of the common. The examples gathered in this special issue invite us—and, as we hope, new readers—to attend to the role of performance and the thought that it provokes by creating the conditions and possibilities for other forms of life and affection.

On the other hand, "la maraña" (the tangle) provides us with a haptic image not only of the performative and the poetic conceptually, but also of the collaborative process which shapes both the performances and pieces we study as well as

⁴ Trans: "concerns us all as subjects who must become witnesses of our era" (Vergara and Cardona).

this special issue itself. The creative, critical, and activist pieces are tangled, interwoven, repeated, and reverberating—verbs that testify to an open and processual mode of unfolding. We note an aesthetic complicity between the tangle or web—whether in feminist* movements, or in the interventions of women artists—with Christina Sharpe’s concept of the wake (2016). In Sharpe’s wake, we encounter an activation and mobilization of something passed as well as an opening to a present beyond the patterns which set them in motion (in Sharpe, the slave ship; in Ni Una Menos and the Colectiva’s work, femicides).

In this context, the essays by Baginski, Cardona, Rivera Díaz, and Vergara bring out a tangled and woven aesthetic in mutual dependency and liminal spaces. Baginski’s article focuses on the liminal yet revisable spaces between sex, gender, racialization, and nation in Anzaldúa, Cuevas, and Trevino’s work. In Baginski’s analysis of Trevino’s poetry, for instance, identity becomes retrospectively activated and negotiated. Palencia Gutiérrez’s interview with Calavera situates the artist’s intervention in the public, urban spaces of contemporary Spain in the unstable margins of the law and claims to visually, iteratively, and dialogically shape it. Cardona’s essay-collage shows us how artists in the Venezuelan diaspora weave a community beyond national territory, a Venezuela which is a “estado de ánimo” (state of being) in Ferrero’s words and her work with the project *We Must Be Far Away*. Vergara’s article sensitizes us to the possible activation of a community—feminine, ancestral, choral—through the performance of the voice of Chilean poet Vicuña. The essayistic exercise of Rivera Díaz, of consigning a recent history of Puerto Rico through words and their re-significations, makes itself part of the wake which continues to accompany, entangle, and redefine this recent past.

Between the feminist* tide of Cortes Rocca and Palmeiro’s coinage, and Sharpe’s wake, we get to know bodies of water which are neither transparent nor homogeneous, but replete with residues, sediments, absences, and sororities. These residues are intermedial, as a number of contributions for this special issue register: some intermedial and mutual permeations of writing, visual and installation art, and performance are picked up in Rivera Díaz’ “tangled history” of the Colectiva’s “consignas” (slogans). Vanessa Vargas’ work deals with the dancer’s cartographic practices which encounter the (migrant) body as a different map at each turn. In this work, the body’s materiality is also the site of indeterminacy. Cardona’s multivocal text considers how intermedial reverberations are performative in their repetition, reflexivity, and interruptions—in beautiful resonance with Sharpe’s wake and Ni Una Menos’s feminist* tide. Pare’s article also considers the intermedial space as performative in her discussion of Wu Tsang’s *We Hold Where Study* and Las Tesis’ viral *Un violador en tu camino*. She builds on Palmeiro’s idea of the performative and poetic hashtags which bridge Ni Una Menos’ mobilization on streets and on social media (2020).

In contributions by Cardona, Calavera and Palencia Gutiérrez, Cortes Rocca and Palmeiro, Rivera Díaz, Vargas, and Vergara, mediation is a collaborative process as well. And although all of the contributions to this special issue have been shaped by the two-year collaborative research-study of Performance in the Wake, Cardona, Rivera Díaz and Vergara expose in their own writing an encounter with the artists' and activists' methods and practices. This much we can see in Vergara's ludic, etymological method inspired by Vicuña's poetry. Rivera Díaz's analysis seeks to entangle thought about recent history in Puerto Rico. Cardona spins forth the dialogic and fragmented unfoldings of the collaborative project, *We Must Be Far Away*, as well as of Rondón-Rivero's poetic actions. Finally, Palencia Gutiérrez's interview with Calavera and the co-authored article by Cortes Rocca and Palmeiro are further examples of the commitment to the open process of thought which puts into practice the reconfigurations and re-constellations of the political scene around them.



Like the recent previous issue of *Liminalities*, "Performance and Politics, Power and Protest," edited by Sonja Kleij and Kayla Rush (2022), this special issue gravitates around performance and politics, but it approaches their complex relationship from the perspective of the Ibero American and Caribbean world. We suggest that the wake, based on Christina Sharpe's recent work, or "la maraña" (the tangle), based on regional feminist* activism, provide us with haptic images for how contemporary performances modify the concept and practice of the political. While contributors to this special issue do not necessarily come from performance studies per se, performance practices have interpolated and sculpted our studies by attuning them to the shared and contested scene of performance pieces, as well as poetry, literature, and visual arts. In turn, our literary and visual studies inform how we approach the iterative, processual, and emergent forms of performance practices in the wake of the political. This issue, thus, is an invitation to continue previous conversations within *Liminalities*.

In our collaborative work, we have learned that it is in an experiential realm of sensibilities, residues, and emergencies of the thinkable, that the political undergoes its most important contestations today. The essays in this special issue show that this realm is paced by iterative, processual, and open-ended actions. In different ways, they point to a *mise-en-scène* of the body (e.g. poner el cuerpo), of the collective body (e.g. acuerpamiento), and of the word (at the interstices of the poetic and the circulated word), which make the grounds of representation tremble. These interventions don't create objects for us to study. Instead, what this special issue shows in its analyses and writing processes, is how these interventions are thought processes and studies in themselves, transforming our methods, as well as the subjects who study, contest, and create.

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