

Introduction to Autoethnography: Composing Experience through Performance

I wish to share my performance practice and approach to autoethnographic research, so others may document their cultural experience during a time when nationalist, xenophobic tensions are rising globally. -Zoya Sardashti

Autoethnography as a practice helps us recognize power relations that perpetuate inequalities. Engaging in the aesthetics of the self while thinking critically about social norms generates a new set of relations, possibilities and futures. Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. (ELLIS, 2004; HOLMAN JONES, 2005) This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (SPRY, 2001) and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. (ADAMS & HOLMAN JONES, 2008) A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. [1]

Course Objectives:

Pursue artistic practice within a theoretical framework, discovering, creating and articulating practice-based methodologies bespoke to the artist's research.

Partake in creative exchanges with others.

Contribute collectively to an open platform where theory is imbricated within practice and help to develop a culture in which one articulates and shows evidence for practice-based research inquiry at different stages of project development.

To engage in critical inquiry and short readings of practice-based case studies in conversation with studio work.

To engage thoughtfully in the documentation of one's practice, developing images, writings, designs, video, sound files, and links alongside deep reflection, group conversation and feedback.

To contribute to a shared sense of others' practice, building a vocabulary of practice-based methodology and critique, which in turn should strengthen one's reflection on and critical awareness of one's work to become more influential citizens, artists, thinkers, and communicators.

Course Description:

This unique intensive course is an introduction to practice-based research in the fields of live art, performance-making and visual practices. Participants will be invited to create a work-in-progress with an emphasis placed on the intersections of creative and critical methodologies. This course centers on creating an opportunity to develop frameworks (tools and networks) which will enhance one's ability to articulate practical-creative research within theoretical contexts. The nature of this workshop stems from a desire to create an open forum by forming a convivial creative community. The material can be adjusted to suit a wide age range and for the general public. An open call will be released inviting people, with or without disabilities, to participate.

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On the first day participants will write project descriptions for their ongoing creative project in 1st person and 3rd person. They will articulate 2-3 types of specialist knowledge s/he has from practice, either arts or from another field (for example if s/he is a choreographer, s/he may have a specialist knowledge of kinesthetics) and keep an autoethnographic journal during the course. Participants will also practice various exercises of formulating research questions and outcomes through the desires and methodologies

of arts practice. Writing on this topic will be shared with the group. On the second, third and fourth days of the workshop participants will explore the following topics: movement, voice and writing. At the end of the workshop (potentially the fifth day) the group will collectively exhibit or perform documentation of their artistic processes and present their work to an audience.

Movement

Morning Ritual

Source Materials & Theoretical Focus-Joseph May, *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* & Kelly McEvenue, *The Alexander Technique For Actors/Feldenkrais Method*

When does the morning begin? How do we transition from sleeping to being awake to standing? What are the performative implications of being aware or “woke” during this transition? We will remember and re-enact our morning routine (how we get out of bed), perform it and analyze it, step by step, while questioning what it means to be an “upright citizen”. What is an honest interpretation (true to the needs of our body) of standing (up)right? This ritual attempts to use somatic training used in the Alexander Technique and the Feldenkrais Method help negotiate the ethical dilemmas that are ever-present in our daily life.

Voice

I Speak, Therefore I Am

Source Material & Theoretical Focus- Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* “O, that this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew.” & Kristin Linklater, *Vox Eroticus*

Through various vocal exercises we will discover our natural voice by accessing different vocal registers. We will resist rational thinking in the brain related to the Cartesian mind-body divide, in order to access the pleasure principle and release the suppressed libido. Exploring various speech acts (starting with the stanza spoken by Hamlet) we will connect our voice with the sensuality of the body. Eventually we will choose words or phrases that we say often and words or phrases that we want to say but do not. We will craft a personal mantra to find a different voice drawing upon a new vocal register and therefore dropping into a new place in our body.

Writing

Writing Self

Source Material & Theoretical Focus: Judith Butler, *Giving An Account of Oneself* & Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*

We will locate certain textures of “self” in our signature in order to understand how our signature might direct us to writing more precisely about our cultural experience. Since writing is a bodily action, we will experiment with various ways to write about our various sense of selves. We will also ponder how writing with a pencil is different from typing and how writing from a corner is different from writing from a balcony. Analyzing the movements of our signatures will help us discover a new way to narrate our histories and map out possibilities for future identities.

Performance

Accessing Bodily Archives: Private Thoughts & Public Myths

Source Material & Theoretical Focus-Adrian Piper, *Mythic Being* & Dwight Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles, Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics*

In private, how do you move and speak? In public, how do you move and speak? How do you think others see you move and speak in private and public? How do you want others to see you move and speak in private and public? We will create a persona and play with performative modes of moving and speaking in private and public. We will consider what happens to our initial experience once one's persona is performed in public and in private.

Final Presentation

Documentation of the workshop will be performed and exhibited.

Required Reading & Viewing Materials (Materials will be provided in advance.)

Judith Butler, *Giving An Account of Oneself*

Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression & Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*

Dwight Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles, Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics*

Kristin Linklater, *Vox Eroticus* <https://www.linklatervoice.com/resources/articles-essays/38-vox-eroticus>

Joseph May, *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship*

Kelly McEvenue, *The Alexander Technique For Actors*

Adrian Piper, *Acting Like a Man, Mythic Being*

<https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/2018/adrian-piper-concepts-and-intuitions-1965-2016/>

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/130862>

http://www.adrianpiper.com/vs/video_tmb.shtml

1) First published in the German language: Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams & Arthur P. Bochner (2010). Autoethnografie. In Günter Mey & Katja Mruck (Eds.), *Handbuch Qualitative Forschung in der Psychologie* (pp.345-357). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag/Springer. Reprinted with friendly permission of the authors and the publisher.

Grading

My strategy for grading considers the student's needs and the goals of the course. To make the student-teacher relationship more personal, I suggest we create a rubric that is fair to the student and satisfies the university's code of ethics. In each course I expose students to different research methods and writing techniques to encourage them to respond in several ways. Documentation of students' responses connecting their writing practice to other academic domains supports their final grade. I ask that they choose a format of documentation which outlines processes of discovery, denotes questions throughout the course and chronicles self-reflexive exercises conducted outside of class. Students are expected to discuss what they have learned and how it relates to the process of writing in a journal. This assessment introduces students to practice-based research, in hopes they will continue to explore how theories inform practical methods of application, enhancing their ability to articulate various approaches to writing and research within other academic and professional contexts. At the end of the course the students present a self-assessment in the journal and I will grade them accordingly using the rubric we co-created.