



### Course Proposal Form

Every year during fall quarter DANM calls for faculty proposals to teach all core courses, electives and collaborative research project groups. November 1, 2008 is the deadline for DANM to receive proposals for core courses and electives for 2009-10 and for Project Groups that begin in spring 2010.

*Instructions:* Please complete this form and submit to your department for approval and forwarding to the DANM program manager. Proposals must be received by DANM not later than November 1!

#### Title of Proposed Course: Digital Media in Live Performance

**Course Type:**  Core Course       Elective       Collaborative Research Project Group

*If elective, will this be a cross-listed course?*  No     Yes

*If Yes, please list dept(s) and course number(s) it will be cross-listed under: include Dept and Course Number of cross-listing*

**Instructor Name:** Danny Scheie, Elliot Anderson, James Bierman

#### *Abstract*

The intention of the Performative Technologies Project is to create a theatrical performance incorporating digital production elements that are in themselves sufficiently compelling, intelligent, and responsive that they will be capable of sharing the limelight with the performers and, at essential moments during a performance, taking the stage away from the live performers. In effect, these digital production elements will be capable of stepping from the background into the foreground, and of moving the performance through transitional moments in a manner previously reserved for live performers.

In order to accomplish this re-orientation we will privilege the use of digital media in the staging from the very conception of the performance to the actual production. Participants in the project group will be presented with the prospect of a full theatrical production, incorporating skilled performers, the support of designers (sound, sets, lights) and technicians, and the direction of a professional theater director with a twenty-year record of creating media-rich productions. They will be encouraged to envision the kinds of digital technologies they would like to create for this large public showcase; not limiting themselves to projections and digital sound, but including whatever technologies their interests and skills might encompass; such as motion capture technologies or robotics. Given their choice of technologies, they will then begin to develop a narrative or structured sequence of events that will serve as the script or score or scenario for the final performance work. This could even include the re-working of an already existing script or recreating "real" events.

It is expected that the script or score will be essentially completed by the end of the first quarter. During the second (Fall) quarter, much of the overall design for the production will take place,



and the project group participants will create a media plot for the entire production and then build the media, one cue at a time. By the end of the second quarter, the group will have created all the media cues to be showcased in the production in a "beta" version. The focus of this second stage will be to create the most effective media possible for the production.

Finally, the work will be rehearsed, built and staged in the third quarter of the project group (Winter 2011); completing and embodying the work of the planning and scripting and designing of the two pre-production quarters. During this quarter, other students (mostly Theater Arts students) will be brought into the process as performers, designers, stage technicians, etc. The members of the project group will have two essential roles in this final stage. First, it is expected that the media they have created will be subject to refinement as the actual production takes shape so that it will work well within the performance. Secondly, the primary focus of the third quarter will be on the delivery of the media as planned and created in the previous two quarters. This will assure that the media the group members have created appears onstage and works as they originally planned.

### **Weekly syllabus, including specific reading and writing assignments:**

The project group is divided into three segments as described in the abstract above.

### **Reading list:**

There will be no required reading, but several readings will be recommended.

### **Criteria for evaluation:**

Each student will design and build a specified amount of digital media and media enablers. They will also work on creating a common structure to tie their work together, and they will work to see that the media they create is delivered to an audience in a manner that showcases the work properly.

### **Space and equipment needs:**

Space – the second (Fall 2010) quarter should meet in a Theater Arts design studio. The third quarter class will meet at one of the Theater Arts theaters. Some design space or art studio space will also be needed.

The equipment needs of this project will be considerable. For the most part, they will be met by the Theater Arts department, but we will probably need some computer assistance. These needs will be discussed with the DANM director of computing when this course is approved.

### **Department approvals:**

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "John", written over a horizontal line.

Manager: \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Angela Beck", written over a horizontal line.

*Project Group Proposal – Spring and Fall 2010 and Winter 2011*

Faculty – Danny Scheie (Theater Arts), Elliot Anderson (Art), James Bierman (Theater Arts)

*Research Foci* – Collaborative Processes in Performance

*Title* – Digital Media in Live Performance

*Abstract*

The first of the 6 axioms for environmental theater posited by the theater director and theorist, Richard Schechner, outlines a set seven of related transactions that take place in any theatrical event.\* The first three of these transactions, which Schechner labels “primary,” involve the relationships between the audience and the performers, and the four “secondary” transactions take place between the audience, performers, performance space, and the “production elements,” or staging. For the 2010-2011 Performative Technologies project group, we will be conducting experiments that aim of moving staging up from the bottom of the list and of promoting the secondary relationships into the primary set of transactions. This will be accomplished through the use of digital production elements that are in themselves sufficiently compelling, intelligent, and responsive that they will be capable of sharing the limelight with the performers and, at essential moments during a performance, taking the stage away from the live performers. In effect, these digital production elements that share the stage with live performers will be capable of stepping from the background into the foreground, and of moving the performance through pivotal transitional moments in a manner previously reserved for live performers.

In order to accomplish this re-orientation we will privilege the use of digital media in the staging from the very conception of the performance to the actual production. Participants in the project group will be presented with the prospect of a full theatrical production, incorporating skilled performers, the support of designers (sound, sets, lights) and technicians, and the direction of a professional theater director with a twenty-year record of creating media-rich productions. They will be encouraged to envision the kinds of digital technologies they would like to create for this large public showcase; not limiting themselves to projections and digital sound, but including whatever technologies their interests and skills might encompass; such as motion capture technologies or robotics. Given their choice of technologies, they will then begin to develop a narrative or structured sequence of events that will serve as the script or score or scenario for the

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\* Richard Schechner, “6 Axioms for Environmental Theater,” *TDR (The Drama Review)*, 12/6, 1968, pp 41-64.

final performance work. This could even include the re-working of an already existing script or recreating “real” events.

Another possibility would be to explore a theatrical equivalent of the Exquisite Corpse experiments conducted by the Surrealists in the mid 1920’s. In this case, participants would be given a short scene and asked to imagine another scene that would follow it (or precede it) that could grow out of the original scene (or lead to it), given a limited established cast of characters. If this exercise were repeated with a sufficient number of iterations, it could be possible to come up with multiple sequences of events or plots that could result by rearranging a given set of scenes. Producing such an outcome would have the added advantage of providing several different “wholes” that result from multiple arrangements of a set number of parts. The scenes could then be filmed and presented online (with a dedicated plot engine) in such a way that the viewer could experiment with creating her or his own plot by creating their own sequences of events.

The first third of the Performative Technologies Group’s project would result in the creation of a script, score or scenario for the final production. It is expected that the script will be essentially completed by the end of the first quarter, and ready to be prepared for production during the second (Fall) quarter. During this quarter, much of the overall design for the production will take place, and the project group participants will create a media plot for the entire production and then build the media, one cue at a time. It is quite likely that one or more of the designers (sets, lights, sound, costumes, etc.) for the production will join the project group during this quarter. It is also possible that one (or more) member(s) of the group will take on the role of media director for the production, possibly using this work as a basis for their M.F.A. thesis. By the end of the second quarter, the group will have created all the media cues to be showcased in the production in a “beta” version. The focus of this second stage will be to create the most effective media possible for the production.

Finally, the work will be rehearsed, built and staged in the third quarter of the project group (Winter 2011); completing and embodying the work of the planning and scripting and designing of the two pre-production quarters. During this quarter, other students (mostly Theater Arts students) will be brought into the process as performers, designers, stage technicians, etc. The members of the project group will have two essential roles in this final stage. First, it is expected that the media they have created will be subject to refinement as the actual production takes shape so that it will work well within the performance. Secondly, the primary focus of the third quarter will be on the delivery of the media as planned and created in the previous two quarters. This will assure that the media the group members have created appears onstage and works as they originally planned.

The faculty of record responsible for the project group will be Danny Scheie, Elliot Anderson, and James Bierman. While all three will all be involved in the production during the entire three-quarter process, the two pre-production quarters will primarily be

overseen by professors Anderson and Bierman. Professor Scheie will cast and direct the final production, with the continued assistance of Elliot Anderson and James Bierman. In this regard, each of the project group directors will work on this collaborative project from its inception to actual performance. This will assure the continuity and integrity of the project group.

*Student Participation and Preferred Background and Skills*

Students in this project group will be given a chance to explore their interests conceiving, planning and scripting a theatrical performance, as well as designing, building and (in some cases) performing in a theatrical performance, and possibly running the show. While we will be seeking strong skills and interests in some of these areas, we will also welcome students with skills in computer graphics, computer-aided design, digital sound design, video creation, networking, and programming. Skills in such areas as robotics and kinetic sculpture will also be welcomed. It is our expectation that the final presentation will serve as a veritable showcase for all sorts of digital media as well as for engaging drama and performances. In sum, we are seeking students who have an interest in putting digital media with some performative value on the stage, and who have the skills needed to make that media work in performance, or the willingness to acquire those skills.

*Potential forms/ venues for publication*

The “deliverables” envisioned for the “Performing with Digital Media” project group are integral to the conception of the group. The three-quarter process will culminate with a series of eight or more public performances of the work we create on one of the Theatre Arts stages. These performances will be open to the public and are intended to run over two weekends. In addition, we have been discussing the possibility of creating a work that, if sufficiently successful, could be moved to a professional theater stage with an interest in experimental works, such as the Intersection for the Arts Theater in San Francisco. Furthermore, if we succeed in creating a work with multiple possible arrangements of the scenes, we will also create a video version with a “plot engine” that could use the Internet as a venue.