
Wesleyan University

CURATING PERFORMANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY:
A RHIZOMATIC PRACTICE

By

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ABSTRACT

How can performance curators expand their own understanding of the role and its position at the university to actively contribute to education? Further, why should they? This thesis argues that the university performance curator should position their role to enhance the critical discourse taking place in the classroom, and provide opportunities to promote the university performing arts center as a co-curricular space of learning. Doing so unites research coming from professional organizations and foundations in both the performing arts and higher education, with theoretical work from the fields of performance as research, radical pedagogy, cultural, and performance studies to present a series of curatorial strategies that benefit both the student and the artist. This practice gives the performance curator the language to speak between disciplines and stakeholders to support the creation and presentation of contemporary works of performance.

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INTRODUCTION: Performing Arts Curation at The University

This thesis examines the role of curation at the University Performing Arts Center (UPAC) within a broader context of presenting contemporary performance in the United States highlighting the pedagogical possibilities of this curatorial role and home within the UPAC as a co-curricular space. In describing their findings from the 2012 white paper, “Placing the Arts at the Heart of the Creative Campus,” Alan Brown and Steven Tepper note performance curators are increasingly asked to become “more intentional, critical and creative about their own process of artistic decision-making.”¹ In their examination of the role, which they refer to as the performing arts presenter, Brown and Tepper are acknowledging some of the ways the role is changing to become more curatorial. This thesis extends from this field-wide realization that the work of the presenter is changing while looking specifically at the ways this manifests at the university by connecting to the larger goals of higher education.

By focusing on how curating performance at the university presents unique opportunities and challenges, I suggest that the application of a critical pedagogical practice increases the educational relevance of the performing arts presenting series at colleges and universities in the United States and brings an important understanding of intention to their work. This practice gives the performance curator the language to speak between disciplines and stakeholders to support the creation and presentation of contemporary works of performance. This ability to speak between and across disciplines constitutes what I call the rhizomatic curatorial practice. Taken from Deleuze and Guattari’s theory, “a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and

¹ Alan S. Brown and Steven J. Tepper. “Placing the Arts at the Heart of The Creative Campus.” Association of Performing Arts Presenters, 2012, 5.

circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.”¹ The establishment of connections across fields of study is at the core of a liberal arts education and the creation of contemporary performance. As artists are increasingly working in ways that call attention to the various interconnections of their work, a rhizomatic curatorial practice amplifies these connections and further works to build connections between theoretical ideas and organizations of power to support the creation and distribution of contemporary performance.

How then can performance curators expand their own understanding of the role in the University as one that actively contributes to education? I posit the University performing arts curator is uniquely positioned to engage with the complex systems emerging from the institution by extending the critical discourse already taking place in the classroom to the stage or other presenting spaces of co-curricular learning. As such, the University performing arts curator provides an important bridge which can support the study of both theory and practice. Similar to performance studies in its scope as a “border discipline, an interdiscipline, that cultivates the capacity to move between structures, to forge connections, to see together, to speak with instead of simply speaking about or for others,”² so too curation becomes the method by which the UPAC curator works across the University, identifying and negotiating the spaces in which artists can forge connection. This method of incorporating a theoretical, pedagogically engaged curatorial practice becomes praxis or practical application.

Promoting a critical pedagogical approach to curatorial practice engages with artists and their works from a place which “refuses to assume ahead of time that it knows the

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7.

² Dwight Congquergood, *Cultural Struggles Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 27.

appropriate knowledge, language or skills. It is a contextual practice which is willing to take the risk of making connections, drawing lines, mapping articulations between different domains, discourses, and practices to see what will work, both theoretically and politically.”³

While speaking broadly of the University, this theory aligns particularly to the goals of a liberal arts education and its commitment to the idea of an education which provides both knowledge specific to your field of study and a general education. Namely, gaining the ability to think critically and independently and to write, reason, and communicate clearly as the foundation for all professions and an educated citizenry.

How can performance curators expand their own understanding of the role and its position at the University to actively contribute to education? Further, why should they? In this thesis, I argue that the university performance curator should position their role to enhance the critical discourse taking place in the classroom, and provide opportunities to center the university performing arts center as a co-curricular space of learning. This position unites research from professional organizations and foundations in the performing arts and higher education, with theoretical work emerging from the fields of performance as research, radical pedagogy, critical theory and performance studies to present a series of curatorial strategies focused on the mutual benefit of the university to the development of contemporary performance and vice versa.

To that end, I define performance curator as a staff or faculty member at a university whose focus is on the selection and presentation of performance for a public audience which includes students and non-students alike. This role has many names including: Curator, Presenter, Artistic Director, Program/Executive Director. Throughout this thesis I will use

³ Henry Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (Routledge, New York, 2005), 16.

“performance curator” to encapsulate these various professional titles and “university” when referencing institutions of higher education. Further, this thesis looks specifically at higher education in the United States.

I define performance curator as one who creates the conditions to be present and fully engaged with contemporary work created by living artists. This definition is informed by Curator, Historian, and Founding Director of Performa RoseLee Goldberg’s acknowledgement that curating performance requires different skills and knowledge than that of the visual art curator. She described the role as more akin to curator-producer noting “curating performance demands a level of knowledge and expertise across numerous disciplines that is entirely new to the traditional role of curator.”⁴ I also draw inspiration from Anne d’Harnoncourt’s advice to a young curator in which she asks, how can one be fully with art? In other words, “can art be experienced directly in a society that has produced so much discourse and built so many structures to guide the spectator?”⁵ The charge to the performance curator then is to understand and participate in the discourse and structures built around performance, while simultaneously creating the conditions for direct experiences of the work.

My focus on education has as much to do with understanding what it means to curate performance as it does with understanding how curating operates at the university with an expanded emphasis on knowledge production and interdisciplinary collaboration. In doing so, I propose a new framework for higher education performance curation, which informs,

⁴ RoseLee Goldberg, “Curating.” in *In Terms of Performance*, ed. Shannon Jackson and Paula Marincola (Arts Research Center at University of California, Berkeley, and The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, Philadelphia, 2016)

⁵ Christopher Cherix, preface to *A Brief History of Curating* by Hans Ulrich Obrist (Zurich, Les Presses Du Réel, 2008), 4.

and is informed by a critically engaged curatorial practice. Framing my research through a lens of critical pedagogy, an “educational philosophy which believes that ‘knowing’ must be freed from the constraints of the financial and managerial logistics which dominate the contemporary university,”⁶ to support the role of the university performance curator as a facilitator of performance work. Connecting the work of the performance curator to the role of the university as crucial to the creation of new knowledge articulates the value of the university performing art center as instrumental in knowledge creation. In doing so, the performance curator articulates a value to their work and the work of the UPAC beyond the financial benefit or constraint to their institution.

This framework further supports the development and presentation of experimental works of performance as deeply connected to the educational mandate of the university. As Julia De Roeper notes in a 2008 journal article, “Serving Three Masters: The Gatekeeper’s Dilemma”, “experimental work is the research and development arm of the arts, and it is experimental art that has the capacity to produce creative innovation and change.”⁷ This is precisely why universities should be in the business of curating and otherwise nurturing experimental work which, by its nature, is less commercially viable. The Association for Performing Arts Presenters (APAP) has noted this requirement as well in their 2012 white paper, “Placing the Arts at the Heart of the Creative Campus” which emphasized the importance of performance curators to recast themselves into a new role in which they continuously review and update their programs for “a new breed of artists who are vitally engaged in research and discovery, mindful and articulate about their creative process,

⁶ Stephen Cowden, Singh Gurnam, and Sarah Amsler, *Acts of Knowing Critical Pedagogy In, against and beyond the University*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 1.

⁷ Julia De Roeper, “Serving Three Masters: The Cultural Gatekeeper’s Dilemma,” *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 38, no. 1 (2008): 51-70.

open to critical reflection, and who can bridge disciplines and interact with people from different backgrounds.”⁸ This call to arts presenters to act as performance curators aligns with an overall shift in the field of contemporary performance.

As university presenting is moving away from its historic role as a presenter in the model of a touring house and towards a more holistic approach to curating as described by APAP and further explored through “the educational turn”⁹ taking place more broadly in curation, an emphasis on the pedagogical, co-curricular activation of performance curation is both timely and necessary. Performance curators who seek new ways to advocate for and make legible the creative, research-based, methods of inquiry essential to the production of new works of contemporary performance find allies in the theoretical discourse of critical pedagogy, and performance studies. Nevertheless, institutional tensions persist. As the economics of University presenting, like contemporary touring in general remain precarious particularly for small and mid-sized performing art centers,¹⁰ the university performance curator must articulate the pedagogical and community value of their work. A deeper understanding of the history of university performance curation and theory enables the performance curator to work across the university, articulating a position for the performing arts center which emphasizes the curricular, co-curricular and artist-centered benefits of their work, generating outcomes beyond the neoliberal, or market-driven bottom line.

Neoliberalism continues to influence higher education, universities adjust pedagogy to meet this demand - inserting entrepreneurship, design thinking and innovative practices

⁸ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Art,” 5.

⁹ The educational turn embraces new methods of inquiry existing outside of and often in little or no relationship to the performance work. (O’Neill, Paul and Mick Wilson ed. *Curating and The Educational Turn*. Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2010).

¹⁰ Research continues to find that arts funding is highly concentrated in the hands of relatively few large institutions. (See the Helicon Collaborative’s 2017 report, “Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy.” Accessed March 23, 2018. <http://www.notjustmoney.us/>.)

from performance makers themselves into the curriculum, while simultaneously de-emphasizing the role and value of participating and viewing live works of art. In other words, the research methods of artistic practice, like creative problem solving, are divorced from the skills of creative practice and artistic appreciation.¹¹ Creating a hierarchical value system where skills that can be useful to a capitalist work force (problem solving) are emphasized over the creative process. While not a new tension, the neoliberal turn heightens this divide. However, a pedagogically informed curatorial practice is the methodology to speak across and unite this divide, emphasizing the co-curricular importance of performance and the value of witnessing and participating in live performance.

The performance curator works transdisciplinarily alongside faculty, students, artists and community to create opportunity for performance works to take root throughout the institution, becoming essential modes of discourse for artists and non-artists alike. This is the rhizomatic curatorial practice, taking inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari's characterization of the rhizome, where "unlike the graphic arts, drawing or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entranceways and exits and its own lines of flight."¹² A rhizomatic curatorial practice then is an underground map of sorts which can be used to connect seemingly disparate theoretical methods of

¹¹ Neoliberal ideology reframed the social value of higher education as a tool for building the next workforce to serve the new "information economy"—a term that emerged in the midst of globalization to describe the role of U.S. suburban professionals in the global economy. ("The Neoliberal University," *Northeastern University Political Review* last modified February 12, 2016, <http://www.nupoliticalreview.com/2016/02/12/the-neoliberal-university/>).

¹² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

inquiry, artistic modes and ever fluctuating pedagogical and philanthropic interventions all of which influence presenting contemporary performance at the University.

This map is never fixed, and each performance, curator and institution will need to find their own ways of entrance and exit, connection and interconnection. Yet a common understanding of a critically engaged pedagogical curatorial practice advocates for the role of the university performance curator as one that is both artistic and educational. The choice not to separate the artistic from the educational here is essential, as both contribute to knowledge, but are rarely discussed simultaneously. What follows is an exploration of a rhizomatic curatorial practice that connects the co-curricular pedagogical possibilities of performance with this theoretical framework. This is further contextualized by its location at and within a university structure and the history of a liberal arts education. The wealth of scholarship emerging from cultural studies, performance studies and practice as research (or practice-based research) trace this genealogy. Providing critical theoretical underpinnings explored by this thesis to articulate the interdependence of the performing arts center and the university in the creation, presentation and viewing of performance work and its contribution to knowledge production.

In her influential essay “Turning,” Irit Rogoff¹³ considers this educational turn. She argues “delving into these questions is made more difficult by the degree of slippage that currently takes place between notions of knowledge production, research, education, open-ended production, and self-organized pedagogies when all these approaches seem to have converged into a set of parameters for some renewed facet of production.”¹³ So too, a rhizomatic curatorial practice delves into difficult territory, where production (performance),

¹³ Irit Rogoff. “Turning,” *e-flux*, no. 0 (2008), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/00/68470/turning/>.

research, and education are never so neatly delineated. It is this intertwining of seemingly disparate roots that is the work of the university performance curator and that which will be further explored in the following chapters.

I take the educational turn in curation, articulated by Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson as an opportunity to examine performance as a space for its co-curricular pedagogical possibilities. Here the co-curricular can be understood through the considerable research of high-impact practices in higher education.¹⁴ The national survey of student engagement¹⁵ defines the several traits of High-Impact Practices as:

They demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback.

Meaningful interactions, diverse collaboration and learning outside of the classroom are all key experiences of the performing arts series at the University.

Where research into the practice of presenting terms this “arts-based interdisciplinary exchange.”¹⁶ A connection is evident as both value a more collaborative and inter-connected campus. Steven J. Tepper and Alberta Arthurs describe this value by stating “these arts-based, interdisciplinary exchanges produce deeper learning, energize faculty and students.”¹⁷ By connecting desired outcomes of a college education with the value of University

¹⁴See Lynn Book and David Peter Philips, eds. *Creativity and Entrepreneurship: Changing Currents in Education and Public Life* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), Thomas L. Friedman, *The world is flat: A brief history fo the twenty-first century* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2006), and Steven Tepper and George Kuh, “Let’s Get Serious About Cultivating Creativity.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 4, 2011.

¹⁵ “NSSE - National Survey of Student Engagement.” NSSE Home. Accessed February 12, 2018. <http://nsse.indiana.edu/>.

¹⁶ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 7.

¹⁷ Steven J. Tepper and Alberta Arthurs. 2013. “Animating the Creative Campus – Education and Engagement for the 21st Century” <http://toolkit.creativecampus.org/>

presenting, the performance curator articulates and advocates for the deep co-curricular opportunity of University Presenting.

Chapter one provides an overview of the history of University Performing Arts Centers and examines the evolution of these PACs and the evolution of the curatorial role, from presenter to curator paying particular attention to philanthropic interventions by the Ford Foundation. Chapter two examines more recent interventions, taking a deeper look into the direct and indirect impacts of the Creative Campus Innovation Grant into the field of university presenting. Chapter three draws from the traditions of radical pedagogy, linguistic and cultural theory to consider ways in which live performance can be considered as vital to higher education. Chapter four considers the theoretical traditions of radical pedagogy, linguistic and cultural theory as applied to the Performing Arts Center as a space of co-curricular learning. Chapter five looks at one work, Toshi Reagon and Bernice Johnson Reagon, “Octavia E. Butler’s Parable of the Sower” Opera and performance iterations at Williams College, Fairfield University and University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill and explores the pedagogical and curatorial choices made at each University and in each community.

METHODOLOGY

This thesis considers the current conditions of Performance Curation at the University and proposes a set of interconnected practices to guide the selection and presentation of contemporary performance. These practices propose a guide for navigating the complex and often contradictory expectations of their roles as cultural, pedagogical and community conveners. This combining of literature review, interviews, a case study, and my own

experience as a participant – observer¹⁸ builds a case for an interdisciplinary practice centered around the notion of the UPAC as an integral co-curricular space.

A literature review explores theory from critical pedagogy, performance studies, cultural studies and theories of higher education to situate the University Performing Arts Center.

The role and evolution of University Presenting is likewise reviewed, with a focus on the role of philanthropic interventions, from the Ford Foundation’s investment into higher education and the arts in the late 1950s and 1960s under the leadership of M. McNeil Lowry to more recent iterations, specifically the Creative Campus Innovation Grant administered by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP).

This literature review is grounded with a case study of “Octavia Butler’s *The Parable of the Sower: The Opera*,” by Toshi Reagon and Bernice Johnson Reagon, which examines the development and presentation of this work at three Universities – Williams College, Fairfield University and the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill.

True to the rhizomatic form, these multiple points of inquiry create a foundation from which to understand the unique position of the university performing arts curator and propose a set of practices to position the UPAC as an integral part of campus and community life where the University performance curator can play a powerful role in nurturing risk taking, innovation and artistic exploration.

¹⁸ I am currently the Director of the Berkshire Cultural Resource Center at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Part of my role includes curating our performing arts series – MCLA Presents!

CHAPTER ONE: What Is a University Performing Arts Center Anyway?

“America’s colleges and universities have played an increasingly vital role in presenting the performing arts. For more than a century, of course, universities have played a key role in creating and disseminating the performing arts in America. But especially in the period after World War II, this activity has become crucial to artists and audiences. Major performing arts centers have been built on campuses throughout the country; and these centers typically perform multiple functions. They are *incubators* of new work, offering much-needed residencies to artists and providing context for their audiences; they are *educators* of young artists and future audiences; they are presenters of live performance; and they are *catalysts* for cultural awareness in their communities.”¹

The University Performing Arts Center is a space for graduate and undergraduate students to hone their skills on and off the stage. Used by both academic programs and student groups, UPACs host a wide range of events, from fully produced plays, concerts, and evening-length works of dance, to works-in-progress, viewings, symposiums, speaker series, movie screenings, and festivals. This wide range of activity makes the UPAC central to academic and artistic life on campuses across the country, not just for students majoring in the performing arts, but for all students.

UPACs are also community hubs. In many communities, they were the first and sometimes only spaces to see live touring performances. This is especially true in suburban and rural communities, as well as in Midwestern and Western cities. This may be most evident at the Major University Presenters,² a consortium of 19 university-affiliated

¹ *Toward Cultural Interdependence: The Fourth Phase of the Performing Arts in America* (Association of Performing Arts Presenters Position Paper, 2002), 7.

² The Major University Presenters (MUPs) is an informal network founded in 2002 for participants to gather together in the spirit of mutual support and cooperation. The consortium’s purpose is for participating organizations to more effectively align with the educational, research, and public engagement missions of their universities.

Performing Arts Centers and programs across the country with large venues ranging from 800-3,000 seats.

Increasingly, UPACs of all sizes serve as important incubators of new work, providing residency, works-in-progress showings, as well as technical and/or research-based support. They also engage with diverse and underserved populations and build collaborative relationships with other organizations, artists, and K-12 school systems and faculty. This work takes place against a backdrop of growing financial pressure, as overall funding for the arts declines and larger institutional hosts, especially at public universities, grapple with diminishing support for higher education.³

To better understand the unique position of the UPAC as part of the touring ecosystem in the United States, this chapter lays out a history of the professionalization of performing arts training, the creation of the university performing arts center, and the evolution of the performance curator role in the twentieth century. I demonstrate that as the field of performing arts expanded, so too did the role of the performance curator to meet these evolving needs. Earlier in the twentieth century, a booker would select touring theater and dance works. The responsibilities of the role would look essentially the same on a university campus or at a regional theater – providing access outside of major metropolitan areas to professional performing arts. There would have been no expectation of the UPAC to contextualize, situate or work with the local community. All contemporary expectations of the UPAC.

³ “25 Years of Declining State Support for Public Colleges,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* online, last modified March 3, 2014, <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/statesupport>.

As the role of higher education in the United States evolved and become accessible to larger portions of the population, the role of the university performance curator has shifted to support an evolved university and student. Nowadays, the performance curator operates as a collaborative partner with university colleagues, community stakeholders, and artists alike. This is especially true at universities, where the role includes the presentation of touring works of contemporary performance, as well as supporting the research and development of new works alongside artist-initiated, wide-ranging community collaborations. This collaborative work happens within the context of both the university and the performing arts center. As such, performance curators must constantly consider the dual considerations of students and the general public. This manifests in both the selection of artists for a performance season and the ways in which works are positioned on and off campus. This transformation from booker to collaborative partner requires a varied skill set and mirrors the emergence of a social-practice⁴ and project-based model of working by contemporary performing artists.

Before delving into the theoretical and pedagogical context for this transformation, it is helpful to understand the history from which it developed, including the professionalization of performance training, first into conservatories then into the university. The idea of a liberal education, or a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge, transferable skills, and a strong sense of values, ethics, and civic engagement⁵ has enduring roots. As a college education became more widely available in the

⁴ Socially engaged practice describes art that is collaborative, often participatory, and involves people as the medium or material of the work. (“Socially Engaged Practice.” Tate.org. Accessed May 9, 2018. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/socially-engaged-practice>).

⁵ “What is a Liberal Education?” Association of American Colleges and Universities. Accessed March 23, 2018. <https://www.aacu.org>.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this philosophy of education remained predominant.⁶ Each generation experienced increased accessibility to higher education, from the creation of land grant colleges, women's colleges, and historically black universities in the late-nineteenth century to the creation of new public universities fueled by the influx of students from the G.I. Bill in the post-World War II period.

This post-World War II era also brought the development of new academic programs and centers for the performing arts. These university performing arts centers provided an outlet for student and faculty work while also offering space for touring and professional performing arts productions to be seen in small towns and cities across the country. Thus, the UPAC brought together students and local resident communities to share in collective experiences. In addition, the Ford Foundation, under the leadership of W. McNeil Lowry (1957-1975), contributed large investments to the arts. Lowry especially guided funding into the performing arts—over \$280 million during his time at the Ford Foundation.⁷ This large investment stemmed from the philosophy that the “high arts” should be accessible to an increasingly college-educated middle class, and not just in New York City or Los Angeles, but also in their home communities. Moreover, this new audience required an education that would include appreciation of the arts. Lowry's method had three goals designed to systemically advance the arts field:

(1) to financially revitalize the major institutions through leveraged investments that required matching support two to four times greater than the amount awarded by the Foundation; (2) to increase access to the high arts through the establishment of new regional institutions that would disperse the high arts beyond the city of New York and other major metropolitan centers, and (3) to professionalize the high arts by

⁶ William Deresiewicz, “The Neoliberal Arts: How college sold its soul to the market” *Harpers Magazine*, (September 2015). <https://harpers.org/archive/2015/09/the-neoliberal-arts/3/>.

⁷ Katz, Stanley J., “W. McNeil Lowry, The performing arts and American society,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 16:1 (March 2010) 39-40.

establishing conservatories and visual-arts schools to generate a skilled labor force for the increasing number of arts organizations.⁸

This scheme (to use Lowry’s own terminology) to advance the arts correlated with the development of new art and performance programs in colleges and universities across the country, many of which benefited from financial support from the Ford Foundation. With the goal of professionalizing the field, these educational programs greatly expanded opportunities for students to train in the performing arts. Many of these new programs found homes at the large land grant institutions of Midwest and western states—colleges and universities designated by state legislatures or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. The original mission of these institutions, as set forth in the first Morrill Act, was to “teach agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanic arts as well as classical studies so that members of the working classes could obtain a liberal, practical education.”⁹ As the definition of a liberal education expanded in the 1950s and 1960s, many of these land grant institutions evolved into the large public research universities of today. The land grant university goal—to give the working-class a practical education—and Lowry’s goal—to create a skilled labor force for the increasing number of arts organizations— aligned with the Ford Foundation’s larger educational focus: to create opportunities to fund the advancement of education.¹⁰

Performing arts training saw a dramatic shift to professionalization with the increase in the number of programs being offered by colleges and universities in the post-World War II era. According to Kevin McCarthy, “The availability of new conservatories and college

⁸ McCarthy, K. F., et al., *The Performing arts in a new era*. (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001), 13.

⁹ “What is a Land-Grant College?” Washington State University Extension. Accessed March 23, 2018. <https://ext.wsu.edu/documents/landgrant.pdf>.

¹⁰ “Annual Report.” The Ford Foundation. (1958).

programs devoted to the development of artists swelled the ranks of highly trained creators and performers, some of whom succeeded as professionals but many of whom entered other careers and chose to pursue their art as a leisure activity.”¹¹ The upsurge of college enrollment in this period is generally attributed to a combination of factors, including the G.I. Bill, population growth (the “Baby Boom”), and the increasing accessibility of higher education. The expansion of the public university system, especially in the West and Midwest, further contributed to greater access to post-secondary education with an influx of relatively affordable programs. And with a rise in art majors, universities built performance spaces that both served as training spaces for students and allowed for the presentation of touring companies’ work. Unlike the contemporary role of the university performance curator, with an obligation towards engagement and community dialogue, the booker of these postwar UPACs were buying a performance. There was no expectation to contextualize, seek new and diverse audiences, or provide participatory experiences—all skills that fall into the performance curator’s current job description. By contrast, little distinguished twentieth-century university presenters from their counterparts in regional theaters. As Brown and Tepper explain, “to be successful, they just needed enough influence and money to score dates on the touring calendars of famous artists.”¹²

This convergence of increasing enrollment in higher education, the creation of new training programs, construction of new theaters on campuses across the country, and the apex of liberal education of the 1960s, in many ways signaled a pinnacle for the performing arts. However, as the field evolved from the Ford era, the influence of university presenters in the

¹¹ Kevin F McCarthy et. al, *The Performing Arts in a New Era*, 14.

¹² Brown, Alan S. and Steven J. Tepper. 2012. “Placing the Arts at the Heart of The Creative Campus.” Association of Performing Arts Presenters, 24.

1960s and 1970s created a new value system, one “that prioritized educational and community outcomes”¹³ over the box office. As state and private funding to support the performing arts continues to decrease and is increasingly concentrated at large institutions in major cities, a new idea of university presenting has emerged and coalesced through the Creative Campus Innovations Grant Program. This new idea recognized and seeks to bolster the necessary role of the UPAC in the greater performance/touring ecosystem as a place to support the creation of new work and the presentation of works with less certain commercial appeal.

¹³ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 25.

CHAPTER TWO: The Enduring Impact of the Creative Campus Innovation Grant

“The presentation of the performing arts on campuses represents a unique and potent tool for achieving the goals of higher education.”¹

The Ford era made heavy investments in new performing arts spaces and other training programs from the 1960s to the 1980s, which allowed artists of all kinds to develop their talents more fully and to specialize in specific disciplines and performance areas.² This investment has continued to yield results, as the arts remain a popular major for students. According to the US Department of Education, in 2014 there were 7,151 institutions of higher education in the United States. Information on how many post-secondary institutions have majors or programs in the performing arts is not so readily available. However, the Council of Arts Accrediting Associations (CAAA) boasts 1,200 member institutions, and online college ranking site CollegeFactual.com lists over 1,500 post-secondary programs in visual and performing arts. Further data from the National Center for Education Statistics lists 96,000 bachelor’s degrees conferred to students enrolled in visual and performing arts majors in the 2014-2015 school year (the most recent data available), making the arts the sixth most popular field of study.³ While visual and performing arts majors are combined for statistical purposes, this data demonstrates the enduring popularity of the arts despite the war on culture, and the almost complete removal of arts education from K-12 educational standards.

¹ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 13.

² McCarthy, *The Performing Arts in a New Era*, 37

³ Of the 1,895,000 bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2014-2015, the greatest numbers of degrees were conferred in the fields of business (364,000), health professions and related programs (216,000), social sciences and history (167,000), psychology (118,000), biological and biomedical sciences (110,000), engineering (98,000), visual and performing arts (96,000), and education (92,000). (National Center for Educational Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/>).

From this data, we can see notable upticks in the number of art students seeking bachelor's degrees in the past 40 years. While this shift correlates with overall increases in the number of students seeking post-secondary education, it also relates to the professionalization of the performing arts. Similar to trends noted in the 2012 research report conducted by the University of Chicago's Cultural Policy Center,⁴ a larger building boom in the late 1990s and early 2000s also impacted the construction of new university-based performing arts centers, which continues today. Examples include the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill's Memorial Hall (2005), the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland (2001), and the Schwartz Center for Performing Arts at Emory University (2003). All of the aforementioned venues feature multiple performance spaces ranging from the traditional to the intimate, and present a mix of contemporary performance works.

This data demonstrates that the arts and the UPACs that serve them remain popular and essential parts of the university. UPACs typically serve different populations, from departmental productions to touring artists to rental or community needs. Increasingly, these spaces are also utilized to provide residencies for artists to support the creation of new works, as well as opportunities for professional artists to share their work through work-in-progress showings, conversations/lectures, and workshops. UPACs rely upon grant, foundation, and individual donor support to supplement institutional support and continue to present a wide range of contemporary performances.

⁴ Joanne Woronkowitz, et al., *Set in Stone: Building America's New Generation of Arts Facilities, 1994 – 2008*, University of Chicago, (Final Report, June 2012), <http://www.norc.org/PDFs/setinstone%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf>.

Historically, university performing arts presenting has been at least partially funded by the host institution and therefore not solely reliant on the box office or other earned income. However, the economics of university presenting cannot be ignored completely. Touring and presenting are expensive propositions, and philanthropic and financial community support is on the decline. In recent years, as many universities, especially public institutions have faced decreasing public support, they have looked to their UPACs to become more financially independent or even generate revenue for the institution. University curators therefore must strive to balance financial and artistic considerations.⁵ This economic reality often sits in contrast to the essential role of the UPAC as training ground for students, patron for the arts, and increasingly as a space for creative exploration and cross-disciplinary exchange. All roles that cannot be valued in terms of box office potential.

With the expansion of the role of the UPAC, comes too an expanded role for the university performance curator working in a space between academy and community. Most university performance curators build performance seasons that bring a diverse range of performances (theater, dance, music) and interdisciplinary projects to their spaces. They incorporate residencies, commissions, and community outreach into their work as well to reflect this expanded role.

Conversations in the field, captured by the American Assembly report expressed a desire to exchange knowledge and practices that demonstrate this expanded role of the university presenter. From these conversations and with funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Creative Campus Innovations Grant program was developed to

⁵ This is not to suggest that work presented by universities is not commercially successful, but rather asserts a primary focus on the selection of artists' work based on considerations other than the bottom line.

“identify, support, and document cross-campus interdisciplinary collaborations that integrate the work of performing arts presenters in the academy and the surrounding community.”⁶

Awarded and administered by the Association for Performing Arts Presenters, a total of 14 Creative Campus Innovation Grants were awarded to campus-based presenters in two competitive grant cycles between 2007 and 2010.

These Creative Campus grants ranged from \$100,000 to \$200,000 and funded projects designed to place the arts “at the center of academic life.”⁷ Examples of projects include the development of a new “creative thinking course designed to help students in all academic areas harness their creative abilities”⁸ at Montclair State University; a “campus- and community-wide exploration of the issues of capital punishment and their impact on the citizens of North Carolina”⁹ at the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill; “The Secret Life of Public Spaces,” a collaborative project and course designed to “reveal and recast the everyday dynamics of public spaces” at Pennsylvania State University; and the collaboration developed over two-semesters with faculty and Los Angeles-based dance company DIAVOLO | Architecture in Motion to support students’ ability to “collaboratively design and choreograph dance works, performance spaces, surfaces and machines.”¹⁰ Common among these examples and within the Creative Campus program as a whole is the focus on academically integrating the performing arts with other disciplines. Many courses were

⁶ “about.” Creative Campus. Accessed May 9, 2018. [creativecampus.org/about](http://www.creativecampus.org/about).

⁷ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 7.

⁸ “Montclair State University.” Creative Campus. Accessed May 9, 2018. <http://www.creativecampus.org/round-2-projects/montclair-state-university-creative-thinking>.

⁹ “University of North Carolina.” Creative Campus. Accessed May 9, 2018. <http://www.creativecampus.org/projects/university-of-north-carolina>.

¹⁰ “Pennsylvania State University.” Creative Campus. Accessed May 9, 2018. <http://www.creativecampus.org/round-2-projects/pennsylvania-state-university-the-secret-life-of-public-spaces>.

developed and performing artists brought to these campuses to teach or co-teach, often with non-arts faculty.

According to Brown and Tepper, “Against this broader backdrop, there are new demands for campus presenters to forge curricular ties and justify their impact on campus, especially those that receive university subsidies.”¹¹ This way of working asks the performance curator to be “a thought leader who can make interdisciplinary connections and who is facile in working with artists, researchers and scholars in different ways.”¹² To do so successfully, the curator must possess an aesthetic and technical conceptualization of presenting work, as well as the ability to understand and engage with a broad range of mostly humanities-based pedagogies. In doing so, the curator, especially in a university setting, presents opportunities for co-curricular learning that supplements the classroom experience.

In discussing the outcomes from Creative Campus grants, Steven Tepper and Alan Brown highlight the effectiveness of arts experiences as spaces for collaboration, which they refer to as “trading zones”—spaces where ideas can be exchanged in what is perceived as neutral territory, free from the “external pressures tied to extrinsic rewards and strict disciplinary practices.”¹³ This false assumption of neutrality within an arts-based experience undermines and remains unaddressed by initiatives like the Creative Campus grant.

While it is true that artists, particularly performing artists, have become adept at incorporating theory from a variety of disciplines to create research methods that are often project-driven, this ability to work between and across disciplines is not a neutral space. If anything, it is an enhanced practice that remains fundamentally undervalued by the Creative

¹¹ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 9.

¹² Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 21.

¹³ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 4.

Campus grant and its legacy of engagement across university campuses, and by society at large. Until we reframe this understanding from one that assumes that the arts exist to be deployed in service to other academic disciplines (or larger social issues), the role of the arts on campuses will continue to be undervalued. Instead, we should begin from a place that prioritizes the unique and cross-disciplinary perspectives that artists and artist-researchers bring to their own practices. Until we do so, we will be unable to affect the transformational changes to institutions and educational experiences that are the desired outcomes of programs like Creative Campus.

The Creative Campus grants and similar efforts demonstrate important shifts in the field and provide innumerable new experiences for audiences to view and participate in works, both within and outside of University Performing Arts Centers. But by emphasizing expanding the reach of the arts into other disciplines, the classroom experience is prioritized over the performance event. Instead, I suggest a more holistic approach. One that considers this trend towards the participatory as just one thread of an interwoven strategy in which excellence, co-curricular relevance, community needs, and economic realities must all be included and balanced as part of performance curators' ongoing work.

Against this backdrop, the university performing arts curator can promote an approach to curating that considers both the curricular arts-based interdisciplinary exchange promoted by the Creative Campus grant *and* the co-curricular potential of live performance. In doing so, she will create the possibility of a performer/spectator relationship, deepen and make new inroads into learning, and continue to support the American Assembly's concept of the university's role as "amongst the greatest patrons of the arts in the United States." It is this blend of curricular and co-curricular that has not been fully explored.

Initiatives like the Creative Campus Innovations Grant program do not consider the traditional concept of presenting as part of their goal. Instead they call for arts-based interdisciplinary exchange, and the presenter's role as a "catalyst of creativity in the 21st century."¹⁴ Against this backdrop, arts presenters wrestle with the neoliberal tensions prevalent in higher education, which prioritize the economic potential of the Performing Arts Center over the desire to provide robust arts-based, interdisciplinary opportunities for students and the off-campus community alike. This description of the university presenter, and indeed the role of performing arts at the university more broadly, seems to somewhat contradict earlier research conducted by the RAND corporation which states, "the influence of education on participation, however, is not equal across all forms of participation. It is most pronounced among those who participate by attending the performing arts, somewhat less evident among those who participate through the media, and least pronounced among those who 'do' art."¹⁵ With a focus on the interdisciplinary potential of the arts on other disciplines, programs like the Creative Campus initiative with their focus on the interdisciplinary potential of the performing arts outside of the UPAC de-incentivize the performance event and promote opportunities for community, faculty, and staff to collaborate in its place. Opportunities include employing "different" curatorial strategies, like integrating off-campus communities into artistic projects, convening advisory groups and committees to explore themes and consider programming alternatives, and facilitating exchanges between artists and non-artist faculty.¹⁶ Noting these initiatives as opportunities that would be impossible without a grant, Olga Garay, former Program Director for the Arts at the Doris

¹⁴ The 104th American Assembly, "The Creative Campus," 28.

¹⁵ McCarthy, *The Performing Arts in a New Era*, 22.

¹⁶ Brown and Tepper, "Placing the Arts," 20.

Duke Charitable Foundation, acknowledged the difficulty in sustaining these projects, stating, “Even when you can offer real evidence that the arts have a real impact at the end of the day there’s increasingly a bottom line mentality that drives these institutions and as government continues to underfund universities—they are taking the more fiscally pragmatic role.”¹⁷ Thus, as funding dictates the “fiscally pragmatic role,” real opportunities for exploration and research are lost unless additional funding can be secured.

The Creative Campus Grant pushed the field of university arts presenting towards creative place making, community engagement, and a quest for relevance by reaching out to new and broader communities, as well as by creating opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration that did not previously exist. Despite the relatively small number of organizations that received the award (just 14), its influence continues to be felt throughout the field of university presenting today.

The twenty-first-century university performing arts curator is increasingly called upon to engage holistically with artists, the university, and the surrounding community. To be successful, one must maintain a certain curatorial flexibility. Prioritizing sharing excellent work ahead of profitability, providing resources for the creation of new works, generating knowledge, and an ability to articulate value beyond the box office all become elements of the role. Philanthropic and research-based interventions have increasingly focused on the interdisciplinary, across-campus benefits of this work, with little consideration to performances themselves. A typical example might be Mellon foundation projects like the Distil fellowship (explored in greater detail in Chapter 5) which is described as a unique

¹⁷ Olga Garay-English phone conversation with Author, March 23, 2018.

residency which does not “not focus upon an individual performance. Instead they bring the resources of the university’s faculty to inspire and inform artists’ artistic process.”¹⁸

Other grant makers, like the New England Foundation for the Arts, are trying to strike a balance between the quality of the performance and community benefit. One of their programs is a grant for New England Presenters (including university presenters) which provides grants to support touring works. Funding priorities for this grant, known as “expeditions,” include a high level of artistic quality as well as contextual, educational, and adjunct activities, increased access to the arts in communities, and cross-sector exchange.¹⁹ Common to both expeditions and Distil is an emphasis on greater community benefit.

My suggestion, however, is that we reassert a holistic view of the role of performing arts at the university—one that incorporates opportunities for the performance event as well as new collaborations. Doing so considers the collaborative and pedagogical potential that exists curricularly (inside the classroom) as well as co-curricularly (outside of the classroom). We should reflect not only on the role of the arts as it exists to build partnerships with other fields of study, but also on how curators can strategically use PACs as pedagogical resources. I propose focusing on how curating performance exists in dialogue with academic programs, providing opportunities for reflection and integration that are essential to high-impact practices of student learning in higher education.

It is this *co-curricular* space of the Performing Arts Center that most effectively incorporates the goals of Creative Campus and other funding initiatives, as it allows a student and community audience to convene together in a third space—the theater—to witness and

¹⁸ “Mellon Foundation Distil Fellows.” Carolina Performing Arts. Accessed September 30, 2018. www.carolinaperformingarts.org/artsthecore/artists-in-residence/

¹⁹ “Expeditions Touring Grant.” New England Foundation for the Arts. Accessed September 30, 2018. https://www.nefa.org/grants_programs/grants/expeditions_touring_grant

participate in, as Ranciere terms it, this new intellectual adventure.²⁰ And it is the combination of all of these encounters that make up the adventure, allowing for deeper connection with and understanding of an artist's work.

Whereas these philanthropic interventions have underscored the ways in which the arts benefit society and other disciplines, I assert a position for the performing arts themselves, and by extension, the role of the performing arts curator. This position does not center the interdisciplinary or collaborative potential of a work, but instead strives to bring a work to fruition on its own terms, creating a dialogue with the artist and arguing against an either/or paradigm of curatorial excellence or community benefit. We should resist such a hierarchy and curate works that both have an articulable community benefit and are excellent works of performance.

However, there are structural and institutional tensions at the intersections between pedagogy and curation and the university, which likely can never be fully resolved. For example, the neoliberal approach has commodified and valued "creative thinking" and simultaneously discouraged means of creative production and education. The arts are not immune to this proliferation of capitalistic principles throughout the university, the result of which is often the separation of desired soft skills (frequently termed "creative problem solving" or "design-thinking") from participation in or appreciation for the arts which continues to be viewed by many as inessential.

Neoliberalism also provides a critique of the Creative Campus initiative, as it emphasizes a learning outcome almost wholly divorced from participation in the arts. In fact,

²⁰ Like researchers, artists construct the stages where the manifestation and effect of their skills are exhibited, rendered uncertain in terms of the new idiom that conveys a new intellectual adventure. (Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by Gregory Elliot. London: Verso, 2009, 22).

new systems like design thinking have emerged as attempts to fill the void left by cutting arts education from K-12 schooling. Rolf Faste,²¹ a professor at Stanford University and the widely recognized creator of design thinking, defines this practice as a “formal method for practical, creative resolution of problems or issues, with the intent of an improved future result. It’s a methodology for actualizing your concepts and ideas.”²² In other words, it is the teaching of creative thinking without the arts. Brown and Tepper advocate for these soft skills when they conclude that arts presenters must take on the challenge of arts-based interdisciplinary exchange to support the creation of “whole brain thinkers” who become “catalysts of creativity in the 21st century.”²³ The development of the “whole brain thinker,” then, becomes the ultimate goal, replacing the previous educational philosophy, which considered an appreciation for the arts to be an important component of liberal education. I argue that best practices would find value in both liberal and neoliberal philosophies, but prioritize artists’ work and the experience of seeing performance not for what it can bring to other disciplines, but for its own benefits.

The Creative Campus mission positions innovation as a guiding principle, and suggests that incorporating works that center goals of “learning, engagement, conversation, [and] community building” above more narrowly conceived notions of “curatorial excellence”²⁴ should be the goal of arts-based inquiries. It is in this perception of the value of art and the attempt to present an “either/or” paradigm, pitting curatorial excellence against academic worth, in which the tension of multiple institutional logics becomes transparent.

²¹ For a more thorough explanation of the history and principals of design thinking, see <https://dschool.stanford.edu/about/>

²² Reuven Cohen, “Design Thinking: A Unified Framework for Innovation” *Forbes* online, last modified March 31, 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/reuvencohen/2014/03/31/design-thinking-a-unified-framework-for-innovation/#3a2744388c11>.

²³ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 28.

²⁴ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 3.

There are two institutional logics most often at odds in this context. The first is a logic of creativity that embraces messiness and ambiguity, and emphasizes the *process* of creativity, not just the final product. This is in contrast to a logic of higher education, which organizes itself around “efficiency, quantification and bureaucratic accountability.”²⁵ Brown and Tepper offer this conflict as essential to understanding the perceived “gap between the arts and the rest of campus, with arts faculty and presenters often feeling marginalized and less valued than other disciplines and domains.”²⁶ Thus, a critical pedagogical approach to curating performance at the university becomes a tool to bridge this divide, and provides some of the most challenging and rewarding curatorial opportunities.

Promoting such a critical pedagogical approach to curatorial practice engages with artists and their works from a place that “refuses to assume ahead of time that it knows the appropriate knowledge, language or skills. It is a contextual practice which is willing to take the risk of making connections, drawing lines, mapping articulations between different domains, discourses, and practices to see what will work, both theoretically and politically.”²⁷ Karyn Sandlos argues that “curating and pedagogy have in common the belatedness of acting without fully knowing or being able to articulate what one is doing in advance.”²⁸ This approach to curation at the university expands the potentiality of the performance experience and positions the work of the curator in a constant pedagogical conversation connecting the paradigm of community engagement and artistic excellence. Blending a theoretically informed understanding with this ambiguous state gives the curator

²⁵ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 10.

²⁶ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 10.

²⁷ Henry Giroux. *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 16.

²⁸ Karyn Sandlos, “Curating and Pedagogy in the Strange Time of Short Film and Video Exhibition.” *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2004): 17–33.

the tools and the language to exist within both the creative and bureaucratic systems at the university. This is the next step in a series of interventions stemming from the Ford Foundation era through the Creative Campus initiative and up to our current moment.

CHAPTER THREE: Theoretical Interconnections

“An account of scholarly development offers only a partial accounting of the space in which knowledge is produced.”¹

This chapter examines the intersection between the academic institutionalization of the performing arts in higher education and theoretical inquiry in the related disciplines of performance studies, critical theory, and radical pedagogy. It is important to note that while these ideas and lessons are focused towards the direct experience of current university students, they are also available and important to a general audience attending and participating in public events curated by the university performing arts center.

As discussed in the previous two chapters, the ways in which the performing arts are positioned at the university is constantly evolving, and with decreased government and philanthropic support for the arts as a whole, the field of performance presenting has begun to situate itself within a community context. At the university, the community context includes the academic realm. In the university performing arts center, the performance curator is called to “understand community need and then refract that knowledge through artistic vision and core capacities.”² To do so successfully, those in this role must be conversant in the theoretical underpinnings central to understanding performance as a knowledge generator. Thus, the performance curator becomes “a catalyst of intellectual discourse on campus.”³ Performing arts practices are frequently recognized as methods to support interdisciplinary learning across the university. Performance practitioners, many of

¹ Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

² Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 21.

³ Brown and Tepper, “Placing the Arts,” 21.

whom have academic or partially-academic careers, are increasingly identifying their practices as research-based. Further, practitioners draw from several academic disciplines and often align themselves with the subaltern, questioning and examining their relationship to institutional power and dominant philosophies. To curate interdisciplinary performance practices, the university performance curator must also be aware of these schools of thought. And because performance practitioners within higher education have articulated a practice rooted in academics, the university performance curator must likewise articulate a pedagogical practice that positions their work within this larger academic frame—as an extension of classroom learning. This is the co-curricular pedagogical practice of the performance curator.

As theater and dance training moved into the academy, institutions of higher education evolved to support these programs. Many of these same academic lessons and theories can also be applied co-curricularly—or outside of the classroom—for a larger audience of performance-goers. Thus, the pedagogical implications of the performance experience in higher education can be examined through the lens of liberal arts educational ideals: the ability to produce citizens capable of critical inquiry. Just as performance art pedagogy “resists cultural conformity and domination by creating discourses and practices that are multi-centric, participatory, indeterminate, interdisciplinary, reflexive and intercultural,”⁴ a curatorial pedagogy resists easy definition and clear academic boundaries. University performance curators draw from ideas within varied areas of study to not only select artists, but also to position them theoretically and co-curricularly within the context of a liberal arts education. It is this multi-centric, reflexive, participatory, and ultimately

⁴ Charles Garoian, *Performing Pedagogy: Toward an Art of Politics*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 10.

indeterminate way of working that provides an opportunity for richly layered pedagogical and aesthetic experiences to take root within the university performing arts center.

Focusing on the aforementioned modes of inquiry and borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari,⁵ this chapter lays out a rhizomatic structure to connect theoretical ideas, asserting the pedagogical potential of the performing arts series at the university. It also proposes a curatorial practice informed by theory to strengthen the educational relevance of the university performance series and, ideally, align creative efforts in- and outside of the classroom. Garosian argues, “A pragmatic form of cultural criticism, performance art serves as critical pedagogy whereby speech codes are taught contested and re-presented in the form of new ideologies, identities and cultural myths.”⁶ As both performance as research⁷ and audience engagement strategies⁸ become part of the broader understanding of the ways that performance practices cut across disciplines to generate new knowledge, acknowledging that the performance curator’s role supports cross-disciplinary practice is essential to recognizing the pedagogical possibilities of performance as co-curricular pedagogy.

LINGUISTIC THEORY

Academic disciplines including performance studies, critical studies, and cultural studies share roots in J. L. Austin’s illocutionary act—a component of his larger treatise on

⁵ See Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*

⁶ Garoian, *Performing Pedagogy*, 5.

⁷ See *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research: Scholarly Acts and Creative Cartographies* edited by Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter for a general overview of practice as research.

⁸ Extensive research into audience engagement and cultivating and developing young audiences has been conducted over the last 20 years. For more on this discussion see *Engaging Next Generation Audiences: A Study of College Student Preferences towards Music and the Performing Arts* (2013), *The Art of Participation: Shared Lessons in Audience Engagement* (2010), *Beyond Attendance: A Multi-Modal Understanding of Arts Participation* (2011).

speech-act theory.⁹ For Austin, the illocutionary act, initially described as the performative utterance,¹⁰ describes what is meant by or what transpires between literal words (the locution) and their results (the perlocutionary act). Somewhere between Austin's speech-act theory and speech codes theory, a wide theoretical expanse emerges for performance as a means to constantly engage, challenge, examine, enlighten, and critique our understanding of the world and our position within it—a position that is entwined with personal subjectivity, historical narrative, and cultural conditioning. Speech codes provide a framework for understanding; each social group has an agreed upon system of communication rich with situated meaning. Speech code theory “posits a way to interpret or explain observed communicative conduct by reference to situated codes of meaning and value.”¹¹ The intersection of performance and theory constantly calls this certainty into question, providing a “position from which to engage historical ideologies, to question the politics of art, and to challenge the complexities and contradictions of cultural domination in the modern and postmodern worlds.”¹² The university performing arts center offers an important space to engage with these ideas in a way that extends these conversations and embodied practices beyond the classroom.

Challenging cultural domination is effectively questioning power structures and systems. Foucault, as a theorist with wide-ranging thematic exploration over the course of his career, often considered the role of power and knowledge in society. For Foucault, knowledge is always an exercise of power and power is always a function of knowledge. As

⁹ Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. (William James Lectures; 1955. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

¹⁰ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 67.

¹¹ Gerry Philipsen, Lisa Coutu, and Patricia Covarrubias. “Speech Codes Theory, Restatement, Revisions, and Response to Criticism” in *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 56.

¹² Garoian, *Performing Pedagogy*, 19.

performance makers and curators gain knowledge, they also gain the ability to exercise power. For the performance curator, this manifests as a method of considering the value of presenting. In contrast to a neoliberal emphasis on commercial success, one can emphasize an alternative value structure that reinforces that universities are in the business of education first, and that performance plays an important role in education. As such, performance should be assessed not for its commercial potential but for its contribution to knowledge production. Further, the pluralistic ways in which performance contributes to an education—i.e., performance as research, High Impact Practice, creativity and professional training—form speech codes where different meanings are interpreted in multiple ways depending on that community’s discursive life. The performance curator becomes the translator between these codes, understanding and interpreting the language of each as the rhizomatic roots of their practice.

In her book *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*, Shannon Jackson states, “origin narratives behind the formation of performance studies are filled with interactions between theatre directors and anthropologists, between folklorists and psychoanalytic critics, all working to graft a conversation based in avowedly different modes of knowing.”¹³ Whereas academic performance training has historically focused on stage and trade craft, performance studies considers the act of writing and the generation of reflective and reflexive works, often created in response to specific performances, as their own creative endeavor situated alongside the performance. Performance curation, when considered as illocutionary force or

¹³ Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance*, 7

intent, exists in a space between performance studies and conservatory training to activate the illocutionary act.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Critical pedagogy is a philosophy traced to Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire. In his best-known work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire proposes a new relationship between teacher, student, and society, arguing that the student should be treated as a co-creator of knowledge. Freire believes that education, in the broadest sense, is “eminently political because it offered students the conditions for self-reflection and a self-managed life.”¹⁴ The continued evolution and expansion of critical pedagogy from scholars including Henry Giroux, bell hooks, and Peter McLaren remind of us of the importance of education in affirming public values, supporting a critical citizenry, and resistance as political acts. According to Sarah Amsler, “While critical pedagogy has been isolated in mainstream educational studies and practice, many educators have also been recognizable ‘outsiders’ working against, but from within mainstream and often privileged institutions.”¹⁵ Performing arts presenting likewise occupies an ‘outsider-within’ space at the university—one that is even more removed from the mainstream by its co-curricular positionality.

The role of the university performance curator becomes a murky intersection of academic, performative, research, and community engagement. The performance curator must therefore navigate this intersectional identity and assert positionality and subjectivity through curatorial choices, thereby creating discursive opportunities that can speak across intersecting identities and spaces. Like Freire by way of Giroux, I believe that “educational

¹⁴ Giroux, *Lessons From Paulo Freire*, The Chronicle of Higher Education, October 17, 2010.

¹⁵ Amsler, Sarah S. Revalorizing the Critical Attitude for Critical Education, 66

sites represent the most important venues in which to affirm public values.”¹⁶ Given the neoliberal and capitalist pressures across universities, asserting a critical, academic, and pedagogical curatorial role then becomes crucial to maintaining an identity for the performing arts that is uniquely rooted within the academy’s larger value system: as a place for the production and distribution of knowledge. Articulating this value is and remains a political act.

Critical pedagogy resists a hierarchical structure of knowledge and seeks to interrogate the traditional hierarchy of the professor-student relationship by questioning where knowledge is produced within the educational experience. Situated co-curricularly, or outside the traditional hierarchy of the professor-student relationship, the performance curator can adopt this pedagogical practice. For bell hooks, “to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn.”¹⁷ Curating co-curricularly becomes a powerful practice of, to use bell hooks’s language, freedom. It provides a framework to question power structures, traditional hierarchies, and the ways that knowledge is produced and understood.

Like Foucault, critical pedagogues also concern themselves with representations of power. Specific to pedagogy, they examine power through the roles of student/teacher and curator/audience. Giroux’s theory of border pedagogy is useful in understanding how the work of the UPAC can be applied co-curricularly. Border Pedagogies:

offers the opportunity for students to engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences and language. This means educating students to both read these codes historically and critically while simultaneously learning the limits of such codes, including the one they use to construct their own narratives and histories.¹⁸

¹⁶ Giroux, “Lessons From Paul Freire”

¹⁷ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, (New York: Routledge, 1994). 13.

¹⁸ Giroux, *Between Borders*, 29.

Critical pedagogy becomes a way to challenge the status quo, to understand and critique context and to reflect this back to the personal experience.

The university performing arts center has all the preconditions necessary to make critical pedagogical practices possible. The university performing arts curator can activate these conditions through the selection, combination, and contextualization of specific performing artists and projects. Critical pedagogy in performance can be sustained outside of, but supported by, academics—in a co-curricular context that enables the debate to move outside of the classroom. Doing so, however, makes the performing arts center vulnerable to the same critiques of the value of such work, rooted in neoliberalism.

THE EDUCATIONAL TURN

“What is the role of cultural institutions when arts programs in public schools are not privileged sites of pedagogy (and are often underfunded or discontinued), even while “creative” talent is increasingly identified as necessary for work within the high-income communications, financial, and technology spheres.”¹⁹

Both within and outside of the university, the role of arts programs in education is the subject of much debate. One response has been the rise of arts-based educational programming. Symposiums, essays, and the pre- or post-performance talkback are some of the ways that this manifests not only in universities, but also in contemporary art centers, museums, and community arts programs. In an attempt to provide knowledge, this strategy seeks to supplement, if not altogether circumvent, the problematic relationship between contemporary arts and education. As Wilson O’Neill explains, “historically, these

¹⁹ Johanna Burton, Shannon Jackson and Dominic Willson, “Introduction to Public Servants,” in *Public servants: art and the crisis of the common good* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), xvii – xviii.

discussions have been peripheral to the exhibition, operating in a secondary role in relation to the display of art for public consumption. More recently, these discursive interventions and relays have become central to contemporary practice; they have now become the main event.”²⁰ That is to say, acknowledging the reality that we now have a generation or more of students whose experience has been drastic budget cuts to arts programs, that institutions are seeking new ways to provide an educational context for participating and witnessing contemporary art. This educational turn has been written about almost exclusively with respect to museums and visual arts contexts; however, the same principles and modes of programming also apply to performance.

Programs like the Creative Campus Innovation Grant have also positioned discursive interventions as central to presenting the performing arts at the university. As performing artists are increasingly touring or developing their work in academic settings, they are working across the university, not just in performance centers. In- and outside of classrooms and performance spaces, they are developing methods to work across disciplines, “engaged in research and discovery, mindful and articulate about their creative process.”²¹ And as curatorial practice, the university performance curator coordinates not just one event or performance, but seeks out multiple opportunities for integrated programming.

The multiple responsibilities within curating performing arts at the university—integrated programming, radical pedagogy, and theoretical interventions—all become methodologies by which to engage with the complex role of curating performance. This approach is situated within a discourse of critical theory. In her essay, “Academy as Potentiality,” Irit Rogoff proposes a new sets of terms “that operate in the name of this ‘not-

²⁰ Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson, *Curating and the Educational Turn*, 12.

²¹ Tepper and Brown, “Placing the Arts,” 5.

yet-known-knowledge. Terms such as potentiality, actualization, access and contemporaneity, which for [her] are the building blocks and navigational vectors for a current pedagogy, a pedagogy at peace with its partiality, a pedagogy not preoccupied with succeeding but with trying.”²² Curating performance as a pedagogical practice lives in this not-yet-known state of existence both within the university and within a theoretical framework.

²² Irit Rogoff, *Academy as Potentiality*, in *Education* ed. Felicity Allen p. 132

CHAPTER FOUR: Curating Performance as Co-Curricular Pedagogy

“This is new territory for most campus presenters. Working with artists and academic departments across campus requires presenters to cast themselves in a new role—understanding the disparate needs of partners, identifying opportunities for mutual success, and managing complex creative projects. While this may seem like a tall order, campus presenters are well positioned to assert this role and demonstrate a new level of creative leadership.”¹

THE POTENTIALITY OF THE CO-CURRICULAR

bell hooks argues that the classroom is the most radical space of possibility in the academy, but what if it is actually the university performing arts center? Adding to hooks’s assertion and “urgent call to know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we create new visions,”² I argue that the performance curator can position the university performing arts center as a space of radical possibility. By connecting pedagogically and critically to the experience of higher education, the curator can create the conditions whereby performance events and classrooms build a synergistic relationship that deepens knowledge and extends understandings of where and how knowledge is produced and transmitted.

Initiatives that focus on the external reach out to new audiences, including underserved communities—permeate discourse about the role of university presenting and curating. Public outreach is an important goal that can, at times, have an uneasy relationship to the university’s educational missions. In my experience, such activities are also

¹ Alan S. Brown “Engaging Next Generation Audiences: A Study of College Student Preferences towards Music and the Performing Arts, Report commissioned by the Hopkins Center for the Arts, Dartmouth College 2013.

² hooks, *teaching to transgress*, 12.

considered to be separate from the educational opportunities within the university performing arts center. However, a more radical reading of the university performing arts center embraces a relationship between public outreach and educational missions as parts of a co-curricular pedagogical strategy—one that can transform the performance curator’s work into a “situation, full of suggestive potentialities, rather than a self-contained whole, determined and final.”³ But in order to fulfill this potential, it sometimes requires that the performance curator reject the expectation that the UPAC constantly assert and defend its value on a campus and abide by the outcome matrices, logic models, and market-driven forces of neoliberalism.

This contradictory framework can be seen at work across all levels of arts training, as Andrea Phillips argues:

In the training of artists within largely traditional art schools, in the curating of exhibitions, and in the modes through which those exhibitions are delivered to the public, there is already the expression of the contradictory framework of private values and their naturalization as public within neoliberal financial and moral scenarios.⁴

Like the contradictory framework for the visual arts curator, the performance curator grapples with this conundrum while the university plays an important role in the development of new work—an undertaking generally considered to be within the curricular realm. But what if we expanded our conceptualization of the university performing arts center as a space for co-curricular learning that *combines* the “critical role [of the university] in making sure that new artistic voices are heard”⁵ with an understanding of the transformational potential of connecting the curricular with the co-curricular? Such an

³ Garoian, *Performing Pedagogy*, 23.

⁴ Andrea Phillips “Service: Art, Value, Merit, and the Making of Publics” in *Public Servants*, 211 -212.

⁵ McCarthy, *The Performing Arts in A New Era*.

interpretation would support a theoretical view of education in which we “might revalorize the project to demonstrate, rather than simply defend, the role of critique in democratic public life; and it is through struggling to create conditions of possibility for this practice that we might breathe political life into education itself.”⁶

This is the co-curricular space made possible by the performing arts at the university. The academy has overlooked the performance experience as a site of learning. It is my assertion that curation impacts the presentation of contemporary performance, which can benefit from intentionally considering the pedagogical implications of curatorial decision-making. Serving as classroom, research-lab, and community hub, the university performance curator negotiates the unique position of UPACs, driven by “public-oriented missions of education and outreach.”⁷ This joint mission is most commonly asserted when discussing the value of the performing arts center at the university in its capacity for public good. The Creative Campus initiative brought this work into the classroom through co-taught, interdisciplinary coursework with the goal of extending the arts throughout campus.⁸ The next evolution of the UPAC will be situating the critical pedagogical practices currently taking place outside of the classroom within the performing arts on campus, with similar institutional valorization. To do this, the university performance curator considers the curricular and co-curricular potentiality of selected work, and thus expands the experience of the artist on campus.

⁶ Amsler, “Revalorizing the Critical,” 69.

⁷ Katherine Preston Keeney, “Public Higher Education Institutions' Investment in Performing Arts Centers,” *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 48, no. 1 (2018), 53.

⁸ creativecommons.org.

Focusing on the university performing arts center as a space of potentiality can feel like “an epistemological conundrum of imponderable proportions,”⁹ but the conundrum holds the possibility of asking new questions and exploring new ideas. Aligning this way of working within a curatorial framework of university performance is to reconsider the transformative potential of live art. To understand the theoretical implications of a curatorial framework that is pedagogical in nature, I will refer to Dennis Atkinson’s proposal of the “development of a pedagogy against itself: not focused on what we are and should be (transcendence), but upon the potentiality and ‘unknown of becoming’ provides a guide to consider potentiality.” Atkinson further distinguishes “between an external transcendence that captures experience according to established frameworks of knowledge and practice and an internal necessary transcendence that emerges from the immanence of experiencing.”¹⁰ How performance itself can be situated as co-curricular at the university is key to understanding the pedagogical potential of curating performance at the university.

Through the immediacy and temporary nature of live performance, the university performing arts center becomes a charged space for a “critical practice that shifts away from a distant, analytic mode and moves towards an inhabitation of a problem that is open to participation.”¹¹ This practice challenges the university and the curator to think and work together in this new way. For the performance curator, it requires the adoption of a curatorial co-curricular mindset, and for the institution, it requires embracing a pedagogical approach to learning that values the potentiality of the university performing arts center and its role in co-

⁹ Jackson, *Professing Performance*, 14.

¹⁰ Dennis Atkinson, “Without Criteria: Art and Learning and the Adventure of Pedagogy,” *Public Servants: art and the crisis for the common good*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 143.

¹¹ Emily Pethick, “Resisting Institutionalization,” *Education*, 194.

curricular learning. It also necessitates a new framing of curating performance to provide a common language or speech code from which disparate partners can begin this work.

PERFORMANCE AS HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE

*“In general, the diversity of findings across sites suggests that presenters should think in terms of offering multiple points of entry for students, corresponding to the diversity of students with respect to cultural tastes and level of experience with the arts.”*¹²

Participation in co-curricular programs is widely recognized as an integral part of student life. Co-curricular refers to activities outside the classroom that in some way complement what students are learning in their coursework. Most research into these activities focus on student affairs departments’ efforts to develop programs, and cite the benefits of active co-curricular involvement, like student clubs and athletics.¹³ However, Dessa Bergen-Cico and Joe Visocmi’s research on passive student engagement demonstrates a positive relationship between attending short-term engagement activities and academic achievement, as measured by students’ GPA.¹⁴ Specifically, their study shows the benefits of activities commonly associated with the university performing arts center, asserting that “convenient short-term engagement characteristic of attending co-curricular events such as speakers and performing artists may attract more students and provide a broader view of student engagement than long-term activities and group membership.”¹⁵ This study provides

¹² Alan S. Brown *Engaging Next Generation Audiences*, 6.

¹³ Ashley E. Stirling and Gretchen A. Kerr, “Creating Meaningful Co-Curricular Experiences in Higher Education,” *Journal of Education and Social Policy*. Vol 2: no. 6 (2015), 1.

¹⁴ “Exploring the association between campus co-curricular involvement and academic achievement,” 330.

¹⁵ Dessa Bergen-Cico and Joe Visocmi, "Exploring the Association between Campus Co-Curricular Involvement and Academic Achievement." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 14, no. 3 (2013), 340.

additional support to the idea that the university performing arts center offers a powerful opportunity to apply co-curricular pedagogy through performance.

The performance curator can select artists and projects that connect to the experiences of students and also mirror the academic curriculum. Pedagogically, these choices can further support the benefits of viewing contemporary performance, as “they [students] learn about culture as well as ways in which to question its hegemonic authority. Its multi-centric and dialogic processes recognize the cultural experiences, memories, and perspectives- participants’ multiple voices—as viable content.”¹⁶ This mirrors the High-Impact practice of student learning in higher education, which seeks to develop student abilities. For example:

Reflect—think about experiences inside and outside the classroom; Integrate—see the connections between different courses, out-of-class experiences, and life beyond the institution; and Apply—use what one has learned in different settings by identifying contemporary challenges and presenting novel approaches and practices.¹⁷

A performance curator’s method that supports the outcomes of high-impact practices demands an “integrated approach to public programming rather than the more traditional and territorial departmentalization of these areas of work. This interdisciplinary approach engages a wide framework of timescales and the flexibility to work across strands of programming.”¹⁸ As new understandings of the role of performance as research take place within the university, the performance curator will find further opportunities to co-curricularly address questions of “revisionist and emergent theories in aesthetics and epistemology [which] have laid a groundwork for a reconsideration of art, knowledge, and

¹⁶ Garoian, *Performing Pedagogy*, 67.

¹⁷ Kuh, “High-Impact Practice”

¹⁸ Sally Tallant, “Experiments in Integrated Programing,” *Curating and the Educational Turn*, (Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2010), 188.

the interrelationships among the arts.”¹⁹ This integrated approach suggests that wherever the curricular and co-curricular can find ways to connect, there is the potential for a deeper learning outcome. As the performing arts continue to redefine their work in a university context, so too the university performing arts center is positioned to reflect and extend this research as co-curricular pedagogy.

¹⁹ Arthur Sabatini, “Approaching Knowledge, Research, Performance and the Arts,” *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research: Scholarly Acts and Creative Cartographies*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 119.

CHAPTER FIVE: A Case Study of *Octavia E. Butler's Parable of the Sower: An Opera*

*"I would like Parable to go as many places as it can. It's a global story, it just resonates with humans on the planet... We want to be able to be in dialogue with people, we want to activate some of the things we've learned from the books and one of the things we've really learned from the book is denial is not your friend, silence is not your friend, and being immobile is not your friend."*¹

"Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower: An Opera*" (subsequently referred to as "Parable") by Toshi Reagon and Bernice Johnson Reagon is a new work² that has been shown in its concert (work-in-progress) staging, as well as a fully produced theater work. For the purposes of this thesis, I will look closely at three presentations of the work at universities: Williams College, Fairfield University, and University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (where Reagon is a Mellon DisTIL Fellow)³ as a case study that analyzes the different curricular, co-curricular, and community activities at each location. Primary reference material used to conduct this case study includes information from each university's website, press coverage, my own experience viewing the work at Williams College, and informational interviews conducted with Randy Fippinger, Producing Director of the '62 Center at Williams College; Lori Jones, Director of Programming and Audience Development at the Quick Center for the Performing Arts at Fairfield University; and Alexandra Ripp, DisTIL postdoctoral fellow at UNC-Chapel Hill. Closely examining these

¹ Carolyn Cox, "Toshi Reagon on Adapting *Parable of the Sower* for the Stage and the Urgency of Butler's Work" *The Portalist*, October 27, 2017 <https://theportalist.com/toshi-reagon-interview>.

² According to Toshi Reagon, *Parable* has been in development since 2008 and had its official US premiere at Carolina Performing Arts in November 2017.

³ As part of a \$1 million, four-year grant from the Mellon Foundation, these unique residencies do not focus on an individual performance. Instead, they offer university faculty as a resource to inspire and inform artists' creative processes. DisTIL Fellows collaborate with faculty in a department outside of their own area of expertise, providing them with the opportunity to gain new insights into the questions that have influenced their work and worldviews.

performance iterations, I will consider how “Parable” was presented in terms of curricular, co-curricular, and community programming that explored the interdisciplinary themes of both the novel and the opera.

The performance work “Parable” draws on two Octavia E. Butler novels, *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, to create a musical-theater work that explores Butler’s themes. Reagon explains that Octavia Butler’s books are “really kind of a map of our possibilities. I thought it was important to put this story out because I think theater and music are great ways to communicate difficult things and to inspire people to actually look at them and to face them.”⁴ “Parable” fuses science fiction, African American spiritualism, and a deep analysis of gender, race, and environmental activism. As a theatrical piece, “Parable” creates a “mesmerizing work of rare power and beauty that reveals deep insights on the future of human civilization.”⁵ Told primarily through song, it is almost impossible to walk away from “Parable” without feeling a call to action. It tells a haunting, deeply uplifting, and deeply troubling tale.

In explaining why “Parable” has to be a theater piece, director Eric Ting articulates that the theatrical space invites the viewer to participate in the story. This is not to say that it is a participatory work (except for a few rare moments where the audience is invited to sing along in refrain), but describes Toshi Reagon’s ability to create a welcoming circle, to invite us into her family. Reagon describes this style as creating a “now” community: “The people

⁴ Jeremy Goodwin, “Science fiction, black music meet in Toshi Reagon’s opera-in-progress” *The Boston Globe*, March 22, 2017. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater/dance/2017/03/21/science-fiction-black-music-meet-toshi-reagon-opera-progress/4MrgGD0nJENwP8D22RciJJ/story.html>

⁵ “Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*,” under the radar, <https://publictheater.org/Tickets/Calendar/PlayDetailsCollection/UTR-2018/Octavia-E-Butlers-The-Parable-of-the-Sower/>.

you enter with are your people. The artists on stage are your people.”⁶ This now community is akin to Ranciere’s emancipated community in which “spectators play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the ‘story’ and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators.”⁷ As “Parable” creates a now community, it is hard for audience members to see this work, set in the very near future, and not relate it to our current socio-political climate. Again, Ting articulates this point when he says, “Even though it’s a dystopian narrative that takes place in 2024, it’s hard not to be in the theater with audience members, going through this journey and not recognize yourself in this world.”⁸ This strong sense of “Parable’s” resonance emerged in my personal experience as well as in conversations with presenter colleagues. One colleague said of the experience, “For those who came that were students or faculty, the response was very strong. Weeks later, conversations continued about the performance. Which, for us, is unusual.”⁹

This feeling of resonance, of course, speaks to “Parable’s” quality, but also to how the story is shared as theater; “the theater allows us to be participants in the story in a way that film would never allow us to be. It allows us to be shared participants in the story, in a way that prose doesn’t allow us to be. It allows us to be in the collective act of making. In a way that virtually no other art form does.”¹⁰ The magic of “Parable” is in its storytelling, which allows us, the audience, to feel part of the collective act of making, even though we

⁶ Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* published on October 17, 2017 (The Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi promotional video), https://youtu.be/ZDauE_WFX14.

⁷ Ranciere, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator*, (London: Verso, 2011), 22.

⁸ Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* published on October 17, 2017 (The Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi promotional video), https://youtu.be/ZDauE_WFX14.

⁹ Lori Jones in conversation with the Author March 19, 2018.

¹⁰ Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* published on October 17, 2017 (The Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi promotional video), https://youtu.be/ZDauE_WFX14.

are having a very typical theater experience: sitting in our seats, in performing arts centers, viewing a work on stage. In reviewing “Parable’s” world premiere at the NYU Abu Dhabi Arts Center, Deborah Lindsay Williams also noted the collective power of the performance:

“Olivar Blues” lives up to Toshi’s description: it’s a long song about how gentrification, corporate greed, and the seductive ease of online life erode our communities, without our even noticing. The song tells us that we should have “given two fucks,” we should have “done more to make some changes.” The chorus—the audience part—is simple: “don’t let your baby go to Ol-i-var.” At every performance I attended, the audience sang, and loudly, right through to the song’s final lines: “fight, fight, strat-e-gize, stay together, equal rights.” As we sang, I looked around. A few rows in front of me, I saw a mild-mannered Emirati student of mine punching her fists in the air, while her friend, a girl from Korea, stamped her feet and swayed to the beat. When I talked with those students after the show, they said it was “amazing,” and “awesome.” They loved the singing. “It’s like we were in it together,” they said. What we were “in” was a moment of communal power, a space devoted to the possibility of change.¹¹

Like most works of contemporary performance developed with support from UPACs, “Parable” had multiple work-in-progress showings as well as multiple premieres. The earliest of “Parable’s” performances part of this case study took place at Williams College on November 4, 2016. This work-in-progress showing presented the work in its concert version. With little staging, the actor-musicians largely sat in a semi-circle with Reagon at the center. Beyond them, also on stage, was the band. “Parable” had its US premiere at Carolina Performing Arts at the University of North Carolina on November 16-17, 2017. The last presentation as part of the case study was at the Quick Center for the Performing Arts at Fairfield University on February 3, 2018. These last two presentations were of the fully produced theatrical work. In all three iterations, Reagon participated in curricular, co-curricular, and community-based programming designed to introduce herself and “Parable” to each campus.

¹¹ Deborah Lindsay Williams, “Staging Octavia Butler in Abu Dhabi,” *The Paris Review*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/01/08/>.

At Williams College, Reagon arrived on campus about one month before the performance. Programmed activities during her stay included a class visit to the theater department, a song workshop with Reagon for students, a workshop for Theater and Africana Studies students with Reagon and an Africana Studies professor, and a Q+A session with the Associate Dean of Faculty.¹² All of these programs were designed as curricular activities for current students and faculty at Williams, organized by the performing arts center staff. There was also a post-performance talkback after the work-in-progress showing.

At Carolina Performing Arts, pre- and post-performance activities included a moderated conversation with Toshi Reagon and poet-scholar Alex P. Gumbs, a concerts-in-context pre-performance lecture, and two community conversations, one at a Café in Durham and another at an independent bookstore in Chapel Hill.¹³ While not officially connected to “Parable,” Reagon is also a Mellon DisTIL Fellow at UNC. Mellon DisTIL is a new grant-funded initiative that embeds fellows within specific academic units and to connect artists with “multi-year research residencies, ensuring fellows sufficient time, space and resources to establish productive intellectual and creative relationships with Carolina’s distinguished faculty that go beyond performance.”¹⁴ Reagon is partnering with the Department of City and Regional Planning and working on research related to the issues in “Parable.” In discussing her experience, she says, “We’re having wide-ranging conversations with faculty, students, and community members and surfacing lots of ideas. I’m excited to help take these

¹² “Integrated Programming,” CenterSeries, Accessed March 23, 2018,

<https://62center.williams.edu/events/toshi-reagon-octavia-e-butlers-Parable-of-the-sower/>.

¹³ “Octavia E. Butler’s Parable of the Sower,” Carolina Performing Arts. Accessed March 23, 2018,

https://www.carolinaperformingarts.org/ros_perf_series/octavia-e-butlers-Parable-of-the-sower/.

¹⁴ The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, “UNC-Chapel Hill receives \$1M grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for innovative arts program” news release, July 8, 2016,

<https://uncnews.unc.edu/2016/07/08/unc-chapel-hill-receives-1-million-grant-andrew-w-mellon-foundation-innovative-arts-program/>

conversations and turn them into tangible events across multiple artistic platforms throughout the time I'm in residency.”¹⁵ Reagon’s work as a fellow supports the idea of the arts as ideal “trading zones” where people “exchange ideas, learn from one another, and, having traded, return to their disciplines, richer for the experience and bearing tangible rewards in the form of improved research and teaching practices.”¹⁶ As a Mellon DisTIL fellow, Reagon works with UNC faculty to help them consider new ways of thinking about their scholarship and utilizes her creative expertise to facilitate interdisciplinary connections around

Through her multi-year relationship with UNC supported by the DisTIL fellowship, Reagon is also able to make deep connections with community groups. Most notably, she works with Spirit House, a multi-generational, black, women-led, cultural organizing tribe.¹⁷ Spirit House created a book club and toolkit that included attending a performance of *Parable*. According to Alexandra Ripp, this was unique and significant in two ways. First, it provided a common experience for two communities, Durham and Chapel Hill, which although geographically close to each other, have very different community cultures. Secondly, these outreach activities with members of Spirit House prior to “Parable” packed UNC’s largest hall with a majority non-white audience.¹⁸ Ripp attributed the success of these activities to the DisTIL fellowship which allowed for the development of more sustained relationships between Reagon, UNC faculty, and members of Spirit House.

Toolkits, or guides, also feature in Quick Center’s curricular work at Fairfield University, which produces a Curricular Connections Guide for Faculty and Staff designed to

¹⁵ “Toshi Reagon,” Carolina Performing Art, <https://www.carolinaperformingarts.org/toshi-reagon/>.

¹⁶ S.P. Morreale & C. B. Howery “Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Down with the Silos and Up with Engagement” Ohio Learning Network, quoted in Brown and Tepper “Placing the Arts at the Heart of the Creative Campus,” 13.

¹⁷ “Who We Are” Spirit House, Accessed May 9, 2018. <http://www.spirithouse-nc.org/#intro>.

¹⁸ Alexandra Ripp, phone conversation with the Author, March 27, 2018.

“foster connections between Fairfield classes and Quick Center performances.”¹⁹ Their toolkit suggests opportunities for curricular engagement like performances and lectures that cultivate student reflections and responses; workshops, master-classes, and classroom and panel discussions with artists; and pre- and post-performance discussions.

Common among each performance of “Parable” was the creation of additional programs or opportunities to engage with the work, designed by each performing arts center to support coursework already being offered. In the case of UNC-Chapel Hill, the DisTIL fellowship also supplemented Reagon’s collaborations with faculty to support both her artistic research and faculty scholarship and interests. This layered approach, which includes curricular and co-curricular opportunities to experience “Parable” advances interdisciplinary work at the university. Programs like the DisTIL fellowship reinforce a belief that arts-based interdisciplinary exchange, promoted by the Creative Campus initiative, are the future of university arts presenting, and enable artists to become collaborative partners with leaders in other fields.²⁰ It is important to note that the DisTIL fellowship does not support specific performances or the direct creation of performance work, but in this case, Carolina Performing Arts was already committed to presenting “Parable” through its role as co-commissioner of the piece.

In order to establish the UPAC into a co-curricular space, the university performance curator also has to be aware of the tools available at the university. They must be willing to work boldly within the system of higher education, with its competing demands, be conscious of its limitations, and constantly demand more from the institution—particularly in

¹⁹ “Curricular Connections Guide,” Quick Center for the Arts. Accessed March 27, 2018, <http://quickcenter.fairfield.edu/education/?scrollto=section-curricular-open>.

²⁰ Brown and Tepper, “Creative Campus,” 23.

terms of resources allocated to artists. For Scott Lindroth, Vice Provost for the Arts and Professor of Music at Duke University, this manifested in a realization that “[he] could not make a powerful argument for investment unless the arts truly had a campus wide reach.”²¹ Programs like the Creative Campus initiative and the DisTIL fellowship promote the value of the arts as a site of cross-disciplinary exchange.

This is, however, time intensive work that the university does not necessarily prioritize or value. Faculty participation is often contingent upon their ability to take on non-tenure-track projects. The performance curator must either seek outside funding and/or demonstrate their work’s pedagogical value outside of the arts. And for artists, this requires the ability and desire to work across disciplines and interact with people from different backgrounds. According to Brown and Tepper, “This signifies a radical transformation in the role of artists from virtuosos to enablers and facilitators.”²²

By closely examining “Parable” through its presentation at three universities, we see commonalities in the ways that curricular opportunities are suggested. At each university, the performance curator provided resources for faculty to engage with the work, with the hope that they would bring “Parable” into their classrooms, either directly or indirectly. The artist visiting a thematically or discipline related class would be an example of a direct curricular connection, as Reagon did by working with a senior theater class at Williams College. At Fairfield University, the curricular connections were less direct. The curricular guide suggests “conversation starters” for faculty—questions to, for example, facilitate a student assignment that involves seeing and responding to the work outside of class. While neither

²¹ Scott Lindroth, “Arts at the Modern University: More than a diversion” *Washington Post*, last modified April 13, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2018/04/13/arts-at-the-modern-university-more-than-a-diversion/>.

²² Brown and Tepper, “Creative Campus,” 26.

example is right or wrong, opportunities for students to engage directly with artists can have a profound impact on students and artists alike. Reagon also values engaging directly with students, saying in an interview, “The most important thing for me is to validate young people. Young people are under attack in this country.”²³

Reagon, perhaps more than some other artists, also expects the curators/presenters she works with on “Parable” to create opportunities to work with/in the larger community: “I tell all the theaters we work with that they are the [spaces for] 21st century mass meetings. I ask them what else can they do in this space for their communities. I ask them, who can you hide in this building?”²⁴ Through the DisTIL fellowship, UNC connected Reagon to Spirit House, which planted the seeds for a symbiotic relationship between university and community to take root. In making this request to the theaters presenting “Parable” Reagon is opening up and rebuilding the “Parable” circle, her network of now communities.

In aggregate, the experiences of the three universities in this case study reflect a well-rounded picture of the practices currently taking place at UPACs today. These practices demonstrate the commitment of curators at each institution to provide opportunities for the academic and non-academic communities they serve to experience and learn from “Parable”

It’s difficult to draw direct comparisons as each UPAC engaged with the work from different phases of development and were able to bring varying resources to their engagement work. The opportunities presented at UNC-Chapel Hill, with combined resources from the Carolina Performing Arts center and the DisTIL fellowship provide us with the clearest example of a rhizomatic curatorial practice in action. UNC’s ability to

²³ Toshi Reagon interviewed by Jamara Wakefield, “Toshi Reagon Is Playing Out Octavia Butler’s Legacy and Creating Her Own” shondaland, February 28, 2018, <https://www.shondaland.com/inspire/books/a18698560/>.

²⁴ Wakefield, “Toshi Reagon Is Playing Out”

connect curricular work with faculty, community work with Spirt House, and the co-curricular experience of seeing “Parable” allowed for deeper insight for both audience and artist alike. “Parable” at UNC—Chapel Hill also represents an example of how a curator forwards an interconnected practice, facilitating artistic and contextual connections between artist and institution. While laudable, currently this practice is all too rare in the UPAC community writ large due to its heavy resource requirement both in terms of financial and human capital. Continuing to highlight examples such as “Parable” creates opportunity for individual performance curators to develop rhizomatic practices.

CONCLUSION: Strategies for Curating Performance at the University

“We need to build the extensive reference bank of material necessary for curating, producing, and critiquing both contemporary and historical performance.”¹

“Doing so helps us to frame performance, not only as a heterogeneous field capable of responding to scholarly developments in the humanities...but also as a form that exposes the contradictions, and the untapped potential of academic humanism itself.”²

To conclude this thesis, I would like to return to my initial definition of the university performance curator as someone who creates the conditions to be present and fully engaged with contemporary work created by living artists. In this framework, curating at the university requires a rhizomatic curatorial practice that “uses the virtually endless and multidirectional burrowing of the rhizome root as a structural metaphor. The web-like composition of the rhizomatic eludes absolute authoritarian interpretations and opens the possibility for multiple experiences, identities and cultural interpretations to exist.”³ Like the burrowing roots of a rhizome, the university performance curator engages pedagogically, aesthetically, communally, and critically with contemporary performance work. They provide a co-curricular context and develop a way of thinking about performance that exists in dialogue with the experience of the applied arts.

¹ Goldberg, RoseLee “Curating.” in *In Terms of Performance*, ed. Shannon Jackson and Paula Marincola (Arts Research Center at University of California, Berkeley, and The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, Philadelphia, 2016) <http://intermsofperformance.site/>

² Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance*, 77.

³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 32.

THE ROOT OF ARTS-BASED INTERDISCIPLINARY INQUIRY

“The arts and education are both vital to creating and sustaining our communities, our culture, and our democracy. It's critical that we concern ourselves with nurturing and expanding the connections between and among them. In fact, it's urgent.”⁴

Thinking and curating rhizomatically allows the performance curator to move beyond an understanding of the purpose of arts at the university as “facilitating collaboration, problem-solving, seeing complex projects through to completion and engaging wider public audiences.... framing the arts in this way only brings them into alignment with any number of well-established academic programs on campus.”⁵ Instead of seeing this as the end goal, the performance curator understands that this is just one root of the rhizomatic structure—one that, in recent years, has received primary consideration from researchers and philanthropic funders. The Creative Campus Innovations Grant Program, discussed in depth in Chapter 2, for example, centers the potential of arts-based research to “offer inspirational models integrating the arts into community, campus and academic life”⁶ as one of the grant’s primary objectives.

In educational theory, High-Impact Practices are “deep approaches to learning [that] are important because students who use these approaches tend to earn higher grades and retain, integrate, and transfer information at higher rates.”⁷ And the research emerging from

⁴ Nancy Cantor, “Conscious Connections” (Keynote Address, Arts Presenters’ 52nd Annual Members Conference in New York, NY, January 11, 2009).

⁵ Scott Lindroth, Arts at the modern university: More than a diversion Washington Post, April 13, 2013 - https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2018/04/13/arts-at-the-modern-university-more-than-a-diversion/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.495876676cc0

⁶ Brown and Tepper, “Creative Campus,” 5.

⁷ Kuh, G.D. 2008. *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

the Creative Campus initiative has demonstrated the arts' positive effects on learning across disciplines and university campuses.

THE ROOT OF THE UNIVERSITY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER AS A CHAMPION OF NEW WORK

*“Reagon's Parable is an achievement in modern musical experience. The overwhelming emotions that run through the evening will be hard to shake the morning after. And the score, destined to go down as one of the most innovative cross-genre presentations out there, is a stirring tribute to the unending power of empathy and community.”*⁸

When considering arts-based integrative learning and the day-to-day experience of navigating the many ways the arts are situated at the university, it can be easy to overlook the role of the performance curator in shepherding new works to the stage. *Parable of the Sower: An Opera* benefited from co-commissioning as well as development residencies from several universities, including Williams College, Fairfield University, Emerson College, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and NYU Abu Dhabi. Without these institutions' resources, *Parable* and countless other works may never have been developed. Particularly with more experimental, less commercially viable works, performance curators at the university are able to impact the creation of contemporary performance in vital ways.

Beyond facilitating the development of new work, in many parts of the country university performing arts centers remain the only venue for seeing live performance.

⁸ Jackson Cooper “Stirring *Parable* at CPA among Finest Musical Achievements in Recent Years” CVNC An Online Arts Journal in North Carolina, last modified November 16, 2017, <https://cvnc.org/article.cfm?articleId=8736>.

Curating touring work supports a system in which knowledge is shared and distributed by the translated experience of being in the audience.

THE ROOT OF CO-CURRICULAR PEDAGOGY

Extending the arts across the campus was the goal of the Creative Campus initiative. These projects looked to the classroom as the space to generate knowledge. A centering of the work of the UPAC as a place for co-curricular learning adds to this goal by connecting events in and out of the classroom. In doing so, performance as event, performance as idea, and performance as possibility are all sites in which co-curricular pedagogy can take root. Through a framework of co-curricular pedagogy, the performance curator selects works that augment or support classroom learning. New research shows a positive correlation between attending performances and academic success. This research further enforces a curatorial understanding of the performing arts center as a space of co-curricular pedagogy.

THE ROOT OF POTENTIALITY AND THE THEORETICAL

“A pedagogical way of being in the world that questions both dominant truths and the conditions within which they are thinkable as true; a way of responding to crisis that is decisive, but that does not generalize too quickly; and a habit of thinking in which we continually seek to understand the mechanisms and limits of power in our lives.”⁹

As noted above by RoseLee Goldberg, the contemporary performance curator must build an extensive reference bank of knowledge. As universities and other institutional spaces ask artists to articulate their work in ever increasing ways, a collection of common theoretical ideas becomes an important speech code for understanding and contextualizing

⁹ Amsler, “Revalorizing the Critical Attitude for Critical Education,” 69.

contemporary performance. Artists frequently draw from theoretical ideas that question hegemonic authority, critique power structures, introduce new vocabularies, and articulate the ways in which making performance creates knowledge. These theoretical investigations can be loosely lumped together into a new set of terms, as proposed by Irit Rogoff in her essay, *Academy As Potentiality*: “[terms] that operate in the name of this ‘not-yet-known-knowledge.’ Terms such as potentiality, actualization, access and contemporaneity.”¹⁰ As a curatorial strategy, potentiality gives root to ideas of curiosity, risk-taking, boldness, and the possibility for authentic discovery.

Taken together, these rhizomatic roots support and strengthen one another. It is my hope that a well-developed practice of performance curation arises from these roots, all of which require tending for performance to thrive at the university. While arts-based inquiry has received much attention in recent years, a collective understanding of the role of the performance curator continues to evolve and expand. Gaining further insight into the role of the UPAC as a space for co-curricular learning and the relationship of contemporary performance to critical theory provides opportunities for new rhizomatic systems to grow and take root.

¹⁰ Irit Rogoff, “Academy as Potentiality,” in *Education*, 132.

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