

***Research, Narrative, and Performance:  
Explorations in between the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities***

This cluster explores the cross pollination between research and narrative practices in performance studies, social sciences, and the humanities. By creating a dialogue between these disciplines in a laboratory format, we hope to pose questions and engage techniques in ways that will enrich our engagement with anthropological and humanistic questions, and performative productions. We will explore how social scientists and humanities scholars can learn from theater and the arts a more playful posture towards research, and a more performative understanding of narrative that can translate into either new forms of writing (essays, plays, short stories), or into a revitalized existing practice of academic writing. On the other hand, theater makers, performers, and artists can learn from social sciences' methods more nuanced ways to make dramatic representations.

We will use theatrical devising techniques to engage ethnographic questions and material. In this context, theatrical devices will provide us with tools to analyze our findings through the body and the embodiment of narratives in space. By exploring our narratives through the elements of the stage (lights, sets, objects, sound, bodies etc.), theater can teach us to engage with them more viscerally in our writing. On the other hand, social sciences can teach us to listen to the intricacies of stories in a way that can broaden and deepen the ways in which theater makers render narratives for the stage.

During the academic year of 2016-17, we will:

- 1) Learn the practice of *Moment Work*. This theatrical devising technique is a practice for

working with non-theatrical source material (interviews, archival documents, medical and legal reports, various media sources, etc.) to construct narratives for the stage. Tectonic Theater Project, the originator of *Moment Work*, has used this technique in the creation of such plays as *The Laramie Project*, *Laramie 10 Years Later*, and *The People's Temple*. All these plays were researched and developed for the stage by **Greg Pierotti**, who has taught devising through moment work for fifteen years. As part of the cluster, Pierotti will lead four two-day workshops, two in the Fall of 2016, and two in the Winter of 2017. Moment Work's approach to non-theatrical source material (what anthropologists and sociologists would call ethnographic material, and historians life histories and archival material) has the potential to reveal new aspects of the data collected and analyzed by social scientists or by performers, playwright, and directors. What can we as social scientists and humanists learn when we "stage" our interviews and observations, as opposed to only write about them? How will our writing be affected by a performative understanding of our material?

- 2) Through practice in *Moment Work* and engagement with readings about performance and ethnography, we will also challenge traditional approaches to creating narratives in both social sciences and theater by devising narratives *collaboratively* from shared research material. This cluster is aimed at learning how to listen to, observe, and participate in social events and the stories produced by the people involved in them. At the same time, the laboratory part of this cluster provides tools to engage these events and stories theatrically as a way to analyze them (and later perform them in various forms of writing or performances). Using collaborative devising techniques, we will follow our intuitive hunches to investigate our research not only as scholarship but also through the grammar

and syntax of the stage.

- 3) We will work on shared material that Cristiana Giordano has been collecting on issues of foreign migration to Italy, and what the mainstream media and academic discourses have described as “the refugee crisis” in the Mediterranean and Europe. Giordano’s ethnographic work and its theatrical rendition investigates the narratives, spaces, and experiences that discussions on the “crisis” and national borders tend to erase and marginalize. We will draw from archival, ethnographic and visual material. In particular, we will focus on interviews and collaborations with foreigners and their families; Italian doctors, bureaucrats, activists, and Catholic nuns engaged in providing care, documents, and shelter to migrants; police officers and humanitarian actors at ports of entry, processing the vessels of refugees; Italian chaplains and local mayors dealing with the burial of the corpses of those who die during the crossing; Italian neighborhoods citizens revolting against the presence of migrants in the midst of their communities, claiming rights and benefits for themselves in the face of increased poverty; non-citizens movements marching against racism and discrimination; politicians who further radically different imaginations of a multi-cultural and multi-racial European society; Italian unemployed workers joining the precarity of the seasonal black market in the southern field; and finally, the kind of academic and journalistic tourism that the “crisis” enables, and of which this piece is simultaneously part and critical of.

### **Outcomes**

By the end of the academic year, we will produce a short performance (45 minutes to one hour) based on this ethnographic material, and rendered through the devising technique of Moment Work.

### **Guests**

**Greg Pierotti** is a teacher, writer, performer and director. He has used Moment Work for the last twenty years to devise his own original work as well as his work with Tectonic Theater Project. He is co-author of The Laramie Project, Laramie: 10 Years Later, and The Peoples Temple. He has performed in classical and new work in New York and at such regional theaters as Berkeley Rep, Denver Center, La Jolla Playhouse, and Arena Stage. As writer/director he has received residencies to develop his work at Maison Dora Maar in Provence, The Orchard Project and Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor to name a few. He is an Emmy award nominee and a 2013 nominee for the Alpert Award in the Arts in the category of theater. He is currently devising a new work at UC Davis about the death of Freddie Gray while in Baltimore City police custody.

**Jenny Beth Schaffer** is a physical theater teacher as well as a performer, writer, and director. A former member of the International Action Theater™ Ensemble, Jenny Beth has practiced, performed, and taught Ruth Zaporah's Action Theater improvisation form for over 20 years, in the U.S. and in Europe: [www.actiontheater.com](http://www.actiontheater.com). Jenny Beth will lead a workshop on improvisation techniques to complement our practice in Moment Work.