From the Department

The Fall brings much anticipation for the new academic year with many exciting performances, scholarly engagements, and another generation of terrific graduate and undergraduate students. It is going to be a very busy year. We would like to extend a special welcome to Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson who joined our faculty this year and has already garnered universal praise from students for being “super brilliant!” and a “fabulous and inspiring teacher!”

We would also like to welcome the poetry of Alan Shefsky, the “glue that holds us all together,” to this edition of the Newsletter. Alan was honored, September 26, 2010, at a gala dinner celebration with family, friends, and colleagues for 25 years of service as the Department Assistant and for making possible, with grace and integrity, much of what we do here. To further celebrate and honor Alan’s poetry, he will be giving a poetry reading this year at a time to be announced. This poem serves as a preview.

D. Soyini Madison, Chair

Preface

That I am standing on a preface,
No I mean precipice,
Where to begin?
The great poets advise walking
To let the mind, the spirit, roam.
Sometimes I advertise stillness.
Take now. What’s next?

Standing (sitting) still I am fidgety.
Try staring at your face.
See how you cannot not move?
Your attention flits.
Note how nothing stays
Exactly as you had in mind.

By Alan Shefsky

Alan Shefsky is administrative coordinator for the Department of Performance Studies at Northwestern University, (currently on medical leave), a position he has held since 1985. Alan received his B.A. in English/Creative Writing from Northwestern in 2008. His poetry has been published in literary journals and has been adapted for performance at Northwestern and at a number of venues in Chicago. Alan was a guest artist at the Illinois Summer High School for the Arts, and in 1999 he was the recipient of the Illinois Arts Council Award for poetry.

Prof. Catherine Cole presents
Wallace Bacon Lecture

Catherine Cole presented the Wallace A. Bacon Memorial Lecture on Wednesday, November 2nd at noon in the Alvina Krause Studio. Her talk was titled: “Picturing the Future of the City of Intellect: Ansel Adams and the University of California.”

One of the most prescient and imaginative projects initiated by former University of California President Clark Kerr was to commission Ansel Adams in 1963 to create a photographic portrait of the entire UC system. This project, called “Fiat Lux,” was to “capture and relate in photographs the appearance and spirit of the campuses and activities of the University of California” and to “present a sense of the opportunities which lie ahead.” Kerr challenged Ansel Adams to project, as far as possible, “the next hundred years.” Adams acknowledged this was an impossible task—and yet he tackled it with his characteristic genius. The result spanned four years and produced over 6000 images. After Yosemite, the University of California is Adams’s most documented subject. This talk considered the performative nature of this institutional portrait and explored its potential to serve as a prism through which to view the past, present and future of America’s quintessential—and currently imperiled—“multiversity.”

Catherine M. Cole is Professor of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of Performing South Africa’s Truth Commission: Stages of Transition (Indiana University Press, 2010) and Ghana’s Concert Party Theatre (Indiana University Press, 2001). She co-edited the book Africa After Gender? (Indiana University Press, 2007) and recently served as Editor of Theatre Survey.

P.S.: The Newsletter of the Department of Performance Studies is also available online at www.communication.northwestern.edu
Prof. E. Patrick Johnson launched the national tour of *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (a 2009 Regional Theatre Tony Award winner), at the Signature Theatre in Washington D.C. *Sweet Tea*, written and performed by professor Johnson through the Ellen Stone Belic Institute for the Study of Women and Gender in the Arts and Media at Columbia College, was presented under the direction of Rajendra Ramoon Maharaj. The production received critical press acclaim including *The Washington Post, The Washingtonian, The D.C Theater Scene, The Washington City Paper*, and *The Chicago Theater Beat*.

Prof. Mary Zimmerman directed and wrote a new book for *Candide*, the Leonard Bernstein Musical playing at Boston’s Huntington Theatre. Zimmerman’s *Candide* just became the highest grossing musical and second highest grossing show in the theatre’s history. *The Boston Phoenix* called the production “A knockout! One of Boston’s most gratifying Broadway revivals” and the *Boston Herald* says the musical is “Transporting and flat-out fantastic! When the full cast opens up their voices for the finale, it’s a culmination of all the endless riches and complexity of this soaring, lush *Candide*.”

Prof. Zimmerman’s adaptation of a Chinese Epic titled *Journey to the West* debuted this summer. She will be travelling to India in December with her long-time design collaborators to research a future project, and over the winter she will be at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival directing her new adaptation of the Chinese story *Madame White Snake*. 
Support for this series is provided by the Program in American Studies, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the Program in Latino Studies, the Program in Gender Studies, the Interdisciplinary Program in Theatre and Drama, The Asian American Studies Program and The Graduate Cluster in Critical Studies in Theatre and Performance.

All events will be held in the Alvina Krause Studio, Annie May Swift Hall.

Performance/Art: Artist Talks on Performance Art

Alina Troyano, a.k.a. Carmelita Tropicana
Wednesday, November 9 at 5:00 PM
Troyano is a performance artist, playwright and actor. Troyano burst on New York’s downtown performing arts scene in the eighties with her alter ego the spitfire Carmelita Tropicana and the irresistible archetypal Latin macho, Pingoito Betancourt. In Tropicana’s work, humor and fantasy become subversive tools to rewrite history.

Roberto Sifuentes
Wednesday, February 22 at 5:00 PM
Sifuentes’ work combines live performance with interactive technologies and video as a presentation medium. As a member of La Pocha Nostra from 1994 - 2000, Sifuentes collaborated with performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, presenting performance and installation work at over 200 venues throughout the United States, Europe, and Latin America.

John J. Leaños
Wednesday, May 16 at noon
John Jota Leaños is a social art practitioner who utilizes all and any media to engage in diverse cultural arenas through strategic revealing, tactical disruption, and symbolic wagon burning. His practice includes a range of new media, public art, installation, and performance focusing on the convergence of memory, social space and decolonization.

Performance/Studies: Scholarly Engagements in Performance

The Wallace A. Bacon Memorial Lecture
Wednesday, November 2 at noon
Catherine Cole,
University of California Berkeley
“Picturing the Future of the City of Intellect: Ansel Adams and the University of California.”

Wednesday, February 8 at noon
Karen Tongson,
University of Southern California
“Latchkey Aesthetics and New Sound Karaoke.”

Wednesday, April 18 at noon
Carrie Sandahl,
University of Illinois-Chicago
“The Limitations of Accommodation: Disability and Aesthetic Innovation.”
Department Welcomes New Graduate Students

Roy Gómez-Cruz researches the contemporary circus as a multidimensional performance space where varied forms of circus traditions and popular culture are reinterpreted and packaged for globalized consumption.

Rae Langes is interested in queer performance artists/troupes that embody the grotesque as an aesthetic to construct sexual/gender/national identities, and how their practices complicate normative LGBTQ politics and boundaries of the human body.

Margaret Lebrón investigates performances of patriotism and national identity in the United States, affective and embodied formations of patriotic collectives, and disciplining structures of military training as identity formation.

Stephanie Tam focuses on the performance of well-being in international development discourse, exploring poverty as a dialogue between equality and freedom that is performed, perceived, and constructed through low-income housing and slum upgrading projects. Her research interests include fuzzy performance measurements in developmental economics, human rights, post-colonialism and the international development industry, and the ethics and politics of aesthetics.

Justin Zullo is a percussionist, beatboxer and hip hop producer interested in the correlations of art, activism and identity. His research interests include race and inequality, undocumented immigrant communities, “artivism,” DREAM Act, global hip hop culture, sound installation, ethnography, and Participatory Action Research.

Mellon Grant Funds Dance Studies Research

Northwestern University, in partnership with Brown and Stanford universities, has received a $1,420,700 grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a multi-year, multi-school project that will fund postdoctoral fellowships and weeklong summer seminars designed to advance the field of dance studies.

The project, “Dance Studies in/and the Humanities,” will fund the fellowships at each school from 2012 to 2016. The weeklong summer seminars will allow Mellon fellows to work alongside other recent Ph.D.s, advanced graduate students and junior faculty to formulate strategies for interdisciplinary research and teaching in the field. The inaugural summer seminar will be held at Northwestern June 24 to 30, 2012. The summer seminars will then rotate among the three schools.

“Over the last decade the best young scholars in the dance field have contributed to ongoing conversations across the academy, and the Mellon project aims to intensify this momentum,” said Susan Manning, project director for the grant and a professor of English, Theatre and Performance Studies at Northwestern University.

Northwestern will act as the administrative center for the project. Applications for both the postdoctoral fellowships and summer seminars are due Feb. 15, 2012. Postdoctoral fellowship applicants need to send a cover letter, curriculum vitae, writing sample, sample syllabus for an introductory course in dance studies and three letters of recommendation. Summer seminar applicants need to send a cover letter stating research and teaching interests, curriculum vitae, writing sample and two letters of recommendation.

All applications should be sent to the Dance Studies Search Committee, Northwestern University, University Hall 215, 1897 Sheridan Road, Evanston IL 60208-2240. Electronic applications (in Word or pdf) may be emailed to project assistant Jennifer Britton (j-britton@northwestern.edu) with the subject line “Dance Studies Search.”
Interview with Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson
Assistant Professor, Department of Performance Studies

This fall, the Northwestern University Department of Performance Studies welcomed its newest faculty member, Assistant Professor Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson. After receiving his PhD in Performance Studies from New York University in 2009, Chambers-Letson was the Andrew Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at Wesleyan University, and Assistant Professor at the University of Cincinnati. Prof. Chambers-Letson’s book manuscript *A Race So Different: The Making of Asian Americans in Performance and Law* is under contract with NYU Press. The book studies law and performance in Asian American subject production and subjection. He has also published articles on the work of visual and performance artists Félix González-Torres (Criticism Journal), Kenneth Pietrobono (Women and Performance), Nao Bustamante (TDR) and musical acts Dengue Fever and M.I.A (Women and Performance). His articles on performance works include Ping Chong’s Chinoiserie (MELUS) and the Signature Theater Company’s 2010 revival of Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* (TDR). This fall quarter, Prof. Chambers-Letson teaches two courses: an undergraduate course “Performance and Culture,” and a graduate course “Performing Racial Exception.”

Performance Studies graduate student Jasmine Mahmoud interviews Prof. Chambers-Letson in this excerpt below.

**JM:** I often think that performance studies has a lot of former intellectual misfits who finally fit in when they find this discipline. What was your background before you began your graduate career at NYU in performance studies? What brought you to performance studies?

**JTCL:** My undergraduate work was at the New School. I was a theater major, but I realized very early on that the classes that were most exciting to me were the classes on critical race theory, feminism, and philosophy. I started encountering the work of various performance studies scholars and it seemed like a field that was starting to do the two things that I had investments in: performance, and critical and social theory.

I took a year off between undergrad and grad school. I worked at an HIV service organization. I would literally read Foucault during my lunch break, and work on my grad school applications. I was convinced that NYU’s performance studies program was the right program for me in the right place for me. In a lot of ways, performance studies is a field that draws in people that seem to be misfits because they are often drawn to the intersections of things. For me—with nascent interests in law and policy, fused with political and social theory, and a real interest in performance aesthetics—it was the perfect field to go into.

**JM:** How did your research interests evolve while you were at NYU?

**JTCL:** During my first semester of graduate school, the decision in Lawrence v. Texas came down, which ruled that state statutes banning sodomy were illegal. I had always been deeply interested in the Bowers v. Hardwick case [the earlier case that upheld the Constitutionality of anti-sodomy laws, overruled in Lawrence] in part because as a queer guy it seemed to affect me. But on another fundamental level, I thought it was really strange that the court could determine what type of behavior would be within the purview of the Constitution and what would not. It seemed fairly arbitrary to me.

It happened that the decision came out the same week that I had to give a presentation on J.L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words.* Everything fell together. There is a footnote in Austin, on the fourth page, where he writes: “Of all people, jurists should be best aware of the true state of affairs. […] Yet they will succumb to their own timorous fiction, that a statement of the law is a statement of fact.” It was really interesting to me that the juridical world is formed by performative. Laws are only as good as the last and highest court determines. I saw that not as a bad thing but as a potential: if the law is malleable, we can use the law as a mode of social transformation. So initially I was obsessed with the Supreme Court and even fantasized about writing an exegesis on Supreme Court gossip. But as the project developed, I started to focus more on what the relationship between minoritarian aesthetics and law are. Specifically, not only how aesthetics can respond to the law, but also how the two are imbricated in the shaping of social conditions. As I narrowed the project, I realized the real question I wanted to ask was how minoritarian subjects, and Asian American subjects in particular, utilize performance as a means of engaging with, critiquing, and transforming the conditions produced in and through law.

**JM:** In what ways do you practice performance and how does that practice inform your research?

**JTCL:** I see my work as collaborative in so far as I love working with practitioners. They are doing good work and most of them are struggling and not able to make ends meet. So part of our work is actually creating the environmental and social conditions whereby their work can get attention, which leads to institutional support. I [also] think it is important not to underestimate pedagogy as a mode of performance. One of the things I love about this department is that I see that commitment very strongly in my colleagues and also in the students. When I am putting together a syllabus, for me, it is like casting the grand design for the ten-week performance that is going to go on. To me that is really important: to interrogate the ways in which we perform in the classroom and bring knowledge to life.
Lisa Biggs is performing the latest iteration of Where Spirit Rides, her solo movement theatre piece, for the New Orleans Fringe Festival, November 16th - 20th, 2011, at the Shadowbox Theatre.

This solo movement theatre work tells the true story of two women-- one living, one dead-- who struggled for the abolitionist cause across the bitter, and at times absurd, landscape of antebellum America, and won. Adults Only. Tickets are $8 (with $3 Fringe Pass button) at the door or at www.no fringe.org "If anyone will be in New Orleans for NCA, I hope they will come!"

Meiver De la Cruz held a three-day dance conference in Boston in September consisting of master classes in folk, stage and social dances from the MENA region, community discussions, performances, and a panel of scholars and dance practitioners that she also moderated, titled "Belly Dance: Globalization, and Cultural Appropriation." The speakers were performers as well as dance ethnographers Karim Nagi Mohammed of Egypt (here pictured in performance with Meiver at the Boston University Dance Theater, Photo by Heather Emerson), Jocelyn Chouinard a.k.a Hadia (Canada), Emma Lucy Cole (UK), and from the US Katia Nordgreen and Laura Smith a.k.a Tempest, Donna Mejia (Smith College), and Laura Ligouri a.k.a Naraya (Brandeis University).

Colleen Daniher’s review of Regina Taylor’s The Trinity River Plays will be included in Theatre Journal’s December special issue on intercultural performance.

In August, Victoria Fortuna performed with the community dance group Bailarines toda la vida (Dancers for Life) during their Winter season at the Espacio Cultural Carlos Gardel, Buenos Aires, Argentina. This performance cycle included the premiere of the collectively created piece "...Y el mar" (...and the Sea) dedicated to the family members of persons disappeared during Argentina’s last military dictatorship (1976-1983).

Victoria is a new member of the research group “Linajes bastardos: Apropiaciones y reformulaciones en la danza escénica en Argentina. 1910-2010” (Bastard Lineages: Appropriations and Reformulations in Argentine Theatrical Dance, 1910-2010), directed by the dance scholar Susana Tambuttì through the University of Buenos Aires and the Institute for Research in Movement Arts, National University Institute for the Arts, Buenos Aires, Argentina. During her time conducting doctoral research in Buenos Aires, Victoria digitized and organized the archives of the prominent contemporary dance theater troupe Nucleo danza (1974-2000). These materials are now available for consultation in the library of the Institute for Research in Movement Arts.

Kareem Kubchandani presented his paper “Circular Logic: Queer of Color Dance in Chicago’s Gay Bars” at the “Love, Sex, Desire and the Postcolonial” conference hosted by the University of London in October.

Kareem’s short film, Diamonds, screened at the “Voices of Resistance” festival hosted by the South Asian Progressive Action Coalition on October 15th at the Marwen art gallery in Chicago. He also choreographed and coordinated a Bollywood Dance flashmob this summer: (see: http://youtube.com/trikonechicago to watch).

On October 14, Jasmine Mahmoud presented her conference paper, “Austerity performs: experimental performance and post-recession cultural policy” at the 37th annual Social Theory, Politics and the Arts conference in Lexington, KY. “Black Love,” Jasmine’s review of the black-fern punk rock band NighTrain was accepted by the Journal Women and Performance for their upcoming Punk Antecedents issue.
Rae Langes performed Brick Lining during “Shiftchanges,” a multi-disciplinary event at Defibrillator Performance Art Gallery on July 30th, 2011. In August, 2011 Rae exhibited two art installations in the Electrodes series at Defibrillator Performance Art Gallery titled “Dreaming of Limits, Freedom is Scary” and “Distorted Mirrors, Hearts Cracked Open.” She is currently writing about the intersections of monstrosity, interspecies relations, and queerness.

Munjuliya Rahman presented the paper “Folk, Food, and Famine: Bangladeshi “Folk” Dance and the Bengal Famine of 1943” at the Annual Conference on South Asia at University of Wisconsin-Madison held October 20-21, 2011. She will be presenting the paper again at the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society Conference 2011, which will take place in Dhaka, Bangladesh on December 17-18, 2011.

Gregory Mitchell’s article, TurboConsumers™ in paradise: tourism, civil rights, and Brazil’s gay sex industry, appears in the November issue of American Ethnologist. He is presenting a paper entitled The Romance of Performance: Critical Ethnography, Sex Radicalism, & The Problem of Resistance at the National Communications Association on a conference-wide panel entitled Voicing Resistance: Performing Tactics, Rhetoric & Taboo that includes NU Performance Studies alumni, Dr. Jenn Tybureczy (Rice University), current PhD Candidate Pavithra Prasad, and new Northwestern faculty member in the Department of Communication Studies, Dr. Riley Snorton.

Pavithra Prasad successfully defended her dissertation titled “Full Power: Subculture, Tourism and the Performance of Affinity in Postcolonial Goa” October 7th, 2011. She will also be teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in January (their spring semester), a course titled “Cross Cultural Perspectives on Women and Labor.”

Soo Ryon Yoon presented a paper titled, “Performing Guk-gyuk: Re-imagining South Korea’s National Identity through the G20 Summit 2010” as part of the Parallel Panel “Evolving National Identities” at the Association for Asian Performance Annual Conference, August 10 at Palmer House Hilton, Chicago.
Faculty /Alumni Updates


Meida Teresa McNeal (Performance Studies Department alumna) presented “The Sweet Goddess Project” at Experimental Station in Chicago, from November 10-13th. The show explored the contributions of women to house music culture and history in Chicago. This coming spring Meida will be presenting “The Ladies Ring Shout,” a piece co-devised with Felicia Holman and Abra Johnson. This work will be shown on January 6th 2012 at 7pm in the Alvina Krause Studio. Using a combination of spoken word, movement, and original soundtracks, “The Ladies Ring Shout” journeys through contemporary experiences of women of color. The multimedia work presents four frames that conjure lived realities: statistics and sociological data; everyday quotidian acts; disciplinary codes and rules; mythical imaginings of future possibilities. Free and open to the public.

Prof. D. Soyini Madison will be presenting “Labor Rites” in the spring of 2012. The show will run for two weekends in May (11-13, 18-20) at the Wallis Theatre. The piece is adapted and directed by D. Soyini Madison, with choreography by Joel Valentin-Martinez, Senior Lecturer in the Theatre Department at Northwestern University. “Labor Rites” explores the history of the Labor Movement in the United States and labor as a right and a freedom. The multimedia performance will be a montage of digital imagery, comic satire, dramatic monologue, song, stylized movement, and dance.

Performance Studies // Theater and Drama Fall Graduate Symposium

The Department of Performance Studies and the Interdisciplinary Program in Theatre and Drama will host its annual Fall Symposium. The symposium features research presentations by advanced doctoral students in Performance Studies and Theatre.

Hilary Cooperman (Performance Studies)

Louise Edwards (Interdisciplinary PhD in Theatre & Drama)
“Restaging the Restoration, or, Performance as Historiographic Practice”
Sponsored by the Department of Performance Studies, the Interdisciplinary PhD in Theatre and Drama, and the Theatre and Performance Studies Cluster.

Friday, November 11, 2011
1pm-2pm
African American Studies Conference Room
(Kresge 2-425)