Performing War in the 21C

At the 2002 ADSA Conference in Launceston, I presented a paper on the 9/11 attacks, the immediate responses of the Bush administration, and the repercussions observable in the “public” of the United States—arguably the primary audience group of the events—through opinion surveys and the “rally effect”, framed within the context of Victor Turner’s notion of the “social drama”. This study developed further as the “War on Terror” become the “War on Iraq”. My study came to focus on the strategies employed by, and the performances of, the key political “actors”, and on the preparations and training of land-based military personnel who would become the primary performative instruments of the developing wars.

I observed the emergence of various responses to these developments from performing arts theorists and practitioners, such as the “In Place of War” research project at the University of Manchester, the productions of Version 1.0, the PVI Collective, as well as the recent productions of David Hare’s Stuff Happens (2004 onwards). I observed some of the processes by which the definitions and meanings of the developing events were facilitated by print and broadcast media across the field. I observed the wealth of scholarly literature emerging in various fields, and a large collection of film and television programmes made in response to the first major conflict of the 21st century. My current research is now focusing on the performance of George W. Bush in the role of President of the United States since 2001, my most recent ADSA paper this year reported on this ongoing study. In November 2005 at UWS, I convened a colloquium of arts and communications academics who have written about the post 9/11 world, presenting on the theme of “The Art of Politics”.

This panel, forum, or session will engage with the notion of the performative nature of group-sanctioned, organised, systematic, or systemic violence. Sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer employs the term “performance violence” to discuss the constructed and communicative nature of these types of gestures and acts; the proposed presentation would examine the processes by which such performances are constructed and the types of efficacy that are intended or produced by such gestures. The proposed presentation can also examine some of the responses to such gestures that have emerged from performing arts practice or theory. It can examine some of the performative artefacts of the times, that many of us have encountered by way of electronically mediated modes of production and delivery—film or television, news or drama or documentary. It can examine the ways in which the discipline of Performance Studies might engage with such currents and discourses, and the ways in which the discipline might develop through such engagements.

Proposals are invited from contributors responding to these themes. Those interested are invited to contact Ronaldo Morelos, below, to discuss their proposals and to develop the format for the panel.
Papers will be exchanged prior to the conference. Additionally, a **discussion paper** and **core readings** will be distributed to participants, to which panelists will be invited to respond.

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