

I - Vision

Our culture, with its emphasis on technical and professional specialization, makes it difficult to gain a sense of perspective. My diverse range of experiences allows me to bridge gaps between different cultural modes (scientific, technical, aesthetic, performative, academic and professional), and create experiences, environments and artworks that cross these divisions in new and productive ways. This informs how I structure my responsibilities, curricular design, research pursuits and artistic development.

As an educator, I seek to liberate students' potential and open up productive avenues for thought and action. I strive to create environments where people feel respected and secure, challenged and excited. In doing so I hope to bring the exciting potential of recent technological developments to students, and inspire innovative works that will enhance community, deepen our sense of place, and expand our capacities for knowledge and understanding.

II - Teamwork & Multi-Disciplinarity

Strong "video & media" design requires more than the technical mastery of particular programs or machines, whose specifics are continually changing. It requires that one grasp complex issues of representation, the evolution of mass media, and visual semiotics, and ultimately develop an artistic perspective from which to approach this unique medium. Video as a form is a moving target, incorporating visual and conceptual conventions from classical painting, drawing, film, surveillance, advertising and the evolving multi-dimensional digital media space. It is further complicated by scenic and dramatic conventions that influence how video is "read" onstage. These diverse strands can be wonderfully rich resources for approaching the design of a script or a live event, but only if students are trained to consider them.

Accordingly, courses that pair conceptual frameworks (via readings, screenings, reviews of artistic & theatrical works) with technically focused, project-based assignments, sensitize students to the ways that process affects

product and the ways that “media” move fluidly between various cultural forms. For example, William Kentridge’s process of animation, which records the drawing and erasing of charcoal on the same sheet of paper, is a wonderfully metaphoric way to visualize the content of his work, the residue of history and our attempts to understand, assimilate and overcome it. He is also exemplary in how he crosses traditional barriers, working in theater, opera, animation, installation, and fine art contexts, deftly crafting meaning from each forms’ unique capacities.

That said, technical proficiency is still an excellent way “in” to a field that demands a uniquely broad set of skills from media designers. Theatrical media design requires content creation (filming, animating, editing), and the design and staging of robust and integrated systems for playback and display, combining multiple specialties in one role. My curriculum exposes students to every stage of this process while allowing them the flexibility to tailor their technical learning to their individual interests, capacities and professional goals. As they move through the program their interests guide their development, and they learn how to devise their own unique solutions and capacities.

The School of Drama’s rigorous production schedule provides an ideal environment to put both the contextually based skills and process focused coursework into action in realized productions. By collaborating extensively with other designers, directors and actors, media designers can balance experimentation with the frame of the overall production; by emphasizing effective innovation that advances a story they can keep the more hyperbolic uses of technology in check. The focus on clarifying and supporting theatrical storytelling can also help avoid what critic Roberta Smith damningly calls “techno-boosterism,” the mere reveling in the wow of the new. The context of a live performance event also grounds media technology in its relationship to bodies in space and the world of actual experience; the use of media on stage simultaneously references the wider social context through its very presence and function.

III – Professional Practice with an Experimental Ethos

In the School of Drama, the production process (~22 plays a year) is as important as class-work, and this emphasis drives a rapid condensation of technical and collaborative skills, forging professional artists who can fit in with and adapt to diverse environments. Because media pushes the boundaries of traditional theatrical roles and contexts, the design process for each show is unique. To prepare students for this reality, the pedagogical context also needs to be experimental, and in judging its outcomes I need to consider the overall shape of the students' process—how they work and think, as well as what they make. Ideally, students should push themselves technically, conceptually, and aesthetically, growing from show to show through risk and innovation. Growth requires risk, experimentation, and failure. For many of these students, school productions are the last opportunities to aim high and fall short without damaging their future prospects.

School productions also provide a laboratory for my own technical research and aesthetic experimentation. In designing media for the Schools' production of *ANGELS IN AMERICA*, I used new methods of 3D image capture and presentation, which I developed with partial support from a Berkman Faculty Development grant, to create imagery for the "Prior's ghosts" characters. These became 40-foot high depth-enhanced images that were projected onstage. I also worked with an undergraduate BXA student to create custom code that allowed floor projections to follow actors around the stage. I'm most proud, however, of how these techniques supported and amplified the rest of the production, enhancing the story for both the actors and the audience. While this type of technical experimentation is increasingly widespread in other cultural forms, in theater we are in a unique position to integrate these capacities with effective storytelling.

The new Integrative Design, Arts & Technology (IDeATe) Network also reflects this focused, experimental ethos. Through my extensive involvement with multiple committees, I have helped to ensure that IDeATe's mission

incorporates the School of Drama's core values and strengths, including our skill with meaning production through creative narrative and storytelling. IDeATe is in many ways a larger scale implementation of what we stress in the School of Drama—that extensive collaborative work across disciplines on goal oriented projects can lead to a richer understanding and better outcomes. The School of Drama is uniquely situated to provide “capstone” experiences where students from across the university can begin to learn the “why” of doing things, not just the “how,” and I’m actively supporting this mission through course development, curricular design and student advising.

IV – Creating Opportunities

A key component of a School of Drama education is access to professional experience. These opportunities help students' transition to the professional world and are a natural continuation of the mentoring process. I've hired students as assistants in all of my recent professional work with local arts institutions and in New York. My recent video-sculptures (Depeche Modes of Production) are elaborate objects made from laser cut, inlaid and thermoformed multi-colored plexiglass combined with 3D video imagery. This project (funded by the Berkman Fund, The Frank-Ratchye Studio for Creative Inquiry and a S.O.D. Faculty Summer grant) was developed with the invaluable skills of a recent scenic design graduate (Brandon McNeel).

To get students off campus and into the local community, I created a special “SOD Collaborative Projects” course in which students worked with a guest artist (Anne Patterson) to develop the visual environment for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's composer of the Year, Mason Bates, creator of “Mercury Soul,” a hybrid classical music/DJ dance event at a nightclub in “The Strip” district downtown. The students' design used projection-mapped imagery (live camera, animations, sound interactive graphics) to create a unique environment that effectively showcased the music, musicians and audience. A particularly skilled student coded software that allowed audience members to

stream their phone cameras' video to our screens. I see this type of custom media programming as a particularly rich area for growth and intend to focus the Video and Media Design program on excelling in this area. Another notable local collaboration was with the VIA Music & New Media festival in October 2013 where students worked with local and international artists, creating a dynamic media-box stage for the warehouse venue.

These examples also indicate another aspect of my approach to pedagogy; what I'm currently thinking about and working with in my professional and artistic life is excellent material for students' contemplation. Curiosity is contagious and I bring my curiosity to the classroom; I tell them what I'm working on and often use my professional challenges (media designs, new technologies) and cultural experiences (museum shows, theater, readings, travel) as topics for classroom discussion. I have a long history of mentor-mentee relationships, first as a biology technician at The National Institutes of Health, then as a graduate student at the Massachusetts College of Art, and finally as Julia Scher's technical assistant for artistic surveillance projects around the world. In each of these endeavors, a talented person exposed me to new skills and new ways of thinking, and truly listened to my ideas; in consequence, together we made truly new and interesting work. It has always seemed natural to me to return the favor. So much of what we do is modeling behavior rather than the transmission of discreet content, and I feel that my primary job is to teach them how to be active and engaged citizen/artists, not simply to communicate a specific skill set. My ambition for them is much higher than to be great assistants; I want them have vision and to drive change, creating innovative works that enhance community and generate meaning through the sophisticated use of media technologies.