**Performance Arts & Political Action**

*Wits-UM Mellon conference*

*June 22-29, 2017, Maropeng Hotel, Gauteng, South Africa*

Across the Atlantic triangulating between the United States, Europe, and South Africa, as well as reaching out to the larger black diaspora of the Caribbean and Latin America, the consciously constructed “work” of performance arts regularly interfaces with other performed cultural acts, including political action. Interwoven between historical scholarship, contemporary reviews, live performance, and lived experience, performances arts, whether staged or in daily life, present articulations of changing times. During (and enduring) political upheaval and oppression, the performing arts provide an opportunity for dialogue, resistance and political action. In contrapuntal voices, the arts of performance also express continuing and evolving formations of social and national identity and relationships.

Performance and performativity, as we know well, go well beyond the theatrical and spectacular to interactions on many other scales. A dismissive shrug, a new political slogan, the presence or absence of applause can index vast registers and repertoires of political engagement. Verbal performances, from story-telling and speech-making to comedy and satire, can produce and sustain ideologies, manage and challenge social positions, and accomplish all manner of social acts. And the performance of religious rites and rhetoric extend communicative interactions to other worldly domains as well as engaging social life in the here and now. These modes of performance appear in diverse genres and wide-ranging media from live venues and face-to-face interactions, to radio, film, television and social media. Whether performances are mundane or spectacular, they require both conscious and unconscious work and aesthetic choices. Performance is a semiotically rich field.

This workshop brings together scholars working on performing arts, large and small, as they relate to Africa and its diasporas. Included are music, gesture, dance, theater, and spectacle as well as discourse, oral text and speech acts. Rather than focusing on a specific geographical location or time period, this workshop seeks to explore how the performance arts, broadly defined, mediate among identity, culture, society, and politics. An act, work, or protest from the past can express new meanings in the changing present. Integral to these themes is the intersectionality between race, ethnicity, and gender as well as other expressions of sexuality, nationhood, economic access, religious affiliation, and more.

Potential topics might address, but are not limited to, the following:

* Shaping identity through artistic dialogues between Africa and its diasporas
* Modes of influence and transformation in the arts of performance
* Performing citizenship and anti-citizenship
* The arts of performance as social protest and claims-making (e.g., #FeesMustFall, #BBUM, #BlackLivesMatter)
* Performance genres in face-to-face interactions
* Linguistic practices prescribed and proscribed

**Planning Committee**

University of Michigan: Naomi André, Judy Irvine, Kelly Askew

University of the Witwatersrand: Brenda Mhlambi, Neo Muyanga, Donato Somma

University of Johannesburg: Liz Gunner