

Rapid Fire Text Interview

Lori Esposito and Genevieve Wagner

September 2020

Genevieve Wagner

We are recording, so we can start.

Lori Esposito

Alright!

Genevieve Wagner

Good morning and welcome! Thank you to those who are tuning in to this talk on *Rapid Fire Text*, a show by Lori Esposito, who is a PhD Student in the school of Arts, Administration, Education, and Policy. Her new show just opened at the Hopkins Hall gallery location of the Hybrid Arts Lab and it will be on exhibition through the 14th. You can head to hhg.osu.edu for more information on the show and then also there's a YouTube link that I will post in the chat. I think Lori took the video yesterday at the workshop. It went on, on September 8th. It's a super great way to get more information on how the workshops go, a really fantastic video. So, Lori, to begin, can you provide your super brief overview of the exhibition and the workshop that created it?

Lori Esposito

Absolutely. Thank you for having me and on here. And I am really excited about the project with Hybrid Arts Lab and immediately got my attention and got me excited for the projects going on in this space. *Rapid Fire Text* is an improvisational writing activity that I have done in the past to introduce the semester with art students in the studio arts context. We were just talking about how great art schools are and, so I created this as a way to link studio practice to writing – the kind of writing that artists do. And also, to create a space to exercise emotional writing and also ideation and just thought in an open forum classroom. Often times we would just keep our thoughts to ourselves, but how do we get those thoughts on paper so that we can begin to work with them as material, as ideas within a classroom community within a group setting? So that's what I created it for.

I was also really interested in text as image and the potential for text to take on imagistic sort of qualities. expressive qualities, since the ink that the participants use is so responsive to speed and timing, even like the humidity of the environment. It's happening very much in the moment and so that's where the improvisational piece kind of comes in, you just can't control how that work is going to come out of your mouth or onto the page. So, that's really the big idea.

Genevieve Wagner

Great! There is something so organic and exciting about improvisational work. I think that our culture is really embracing improv in different realms such as improv comedy, improv dance, improv jazz, and improv art making. So, as an artist and an educator, what prompted you to make this art workshop improvisational?

Lori Esposito

I agree so much about that statement with things becoming more improvisational or improvisation being more of a thing and it is more important right now, I think for people since media is so prerecorded, right?

Genevieve Wagner

Yeah.

Lori Esposito

We are in this sort of post-truth age. So, having sort of happening in the moment is a kind of marker of truth in some sense. It hasn't gone through the digital process yet and hasn't been manipulated it's happening right now. There's that sort of direct connection right there that improvisation brings us. And I also wanted to give a nod to the improvisational jazz which is such an important part of our history and has affected the arts so profoundly – the arts, dance, yeah! and I have a quote from Wynton Marsalis that actually I wanted to share. "Improvisation isn't a matter of just making up any old thing. Like jazz, jazz -- like any language -- has its own grammar and vocabulary; there is no right or wrong, just some choices that are better than others." And the other one that goes with that is, "through improvisation jazz teaches you that other people are individuals too. It teaches you how to coordinate with them."

So, if you look into improvisation of listening, look into improvisation of the arts history what the arts has given to – as a gift – to society, and to other disciplines. It's also a space where new things are born, new things leap forward, and you're in an improvisational context: anything can happen, anything is possible. New ideas are generated. And that is really exciting. That was something that I did say in the workshop, but sort of after the fact. I mean I like to point out things not before they happened but as observations after they happened that the participants bring forward. And I was so surprised how little hesitation there was in the workshop. There were plenty of new ideas to come forward. There were many spontaneous discoveries happening by way of the improvisation.

Genevieve Wagner

Wonderful, yeah. I especially liked what you said about improv being truthful and so honest, I hadn't thought about that in that way, but it's so true. It's not manufactured, it's just completely honest and personal. So, thank you for that.

Changing gears to the title of your piece, the rapid and fire elements of your title capture the speed of movement and thought plus the potential power of speed in the written word and when these elements are used in your workshop how they harness power and overcome silence.

Lori Esposito

Yeah, a lot of really good observations in that question. especially the one about silence. I noticed in my classes that there is a tension of silence in the room like an object itself. There's so much going on right now (Black Lives Matter, a pandemic) where we don't have our routines. We don't have a normal. We don't know what the normal is going to be. We don't have a timeline. Things seem to be changing faster and faster. I tried to be cognizant of these realities.

In the title of the piece I try to not force upon the participants a response in a political sense or even as activists, but just to acknowledge the space that we are all in right now and are sharing and creating a forum or a platform for that to be explored as each individual feels. The "Rapid Fire," obviously, there's an implication of speed there -- fast -- and that could be a kind of intimidation, a reaction. There's a violence in the title, in a way. So, when I created this workshop, the social circumstances were really different, and the political contexts were really different, so, yeah. I was just really excited by how the title seemed to kind of resonate with what's happening right now and the challenges in having open conversations or even informal conversations about what our experience is of our time. I think that silencing is a real thing.

Genevieve Wagner

Yeah.

Lori Esposito

Through the writing, through this project, my hope is that if you can write it -- even if it's not legible, even if it's not a word, you can make a mark. You have begun that process of externalizing, orating, or sharing your perspective, your point of view, your vulnerabilities in an open space. I think that that is my way of answering the silence and answering the "I don't know where this person stands on these issues, I don't know if we can have a conversation." This just pushes that out of the way and gives the individual their own surface, their own wall, that sheet of paper on the wall in front of

them as something to break through that is on display in an open space that everyone can see. It's a kind of beginning.

Genevieve Wagner

The importance of improv is like taking that first step and making that improvisational act, which is scary but is liberating and I think that it's really exciting that your using improv that helps kids to communicate how they are feeling. I think that's really wonderful. So, thinking about students, you are working with, hearing from students who have been in the project, how has this project helped them express different parts of their identity?

Lori Esposito

Well I can't speak so much for this group because they haven't written about their experiences yet, but I observed them in this space, and they interacted with each other and some of them came and talked to me afterwards. I am really excited to hear about what they write. They were surprisingly embracing of the activity and they really ran with it. They all knew when they were done. Here I am, having the role of being a timekeeper, but they really took their time and set their own pace and got what they needed out of it. That was really the most important thing.

Genevieve Wagner

That's wonderful. To know when they were done, I feel like that a difficult part of art making, but maybe when its improvisational it might feel more free form and you can have more trust in yourself. Like okay, I'm done.

Lori Esposito

Look, you can't control this thing.

Genevieve Wagner

Right.

Lori Esposito

You can't control what it's going to be in the end, so just enjoy the process, enjoy it as the thing that is. But they – some of them – really wanted to keep them in the end, so that's a good sign! They wanted their picture taken in front of it. So, I was like, "okay, there is something truthful for you on there, on this page," so that is always a good sign.

Genevieve Wagner

That's wonderful. And so, you have had these improvisations workshops in the past, you have done them before. And although that the project is improvisational in nature

and it's difficult to predict the outcomes. How do you think this project will operate differently this semester? So you hosted a workshop yesterday, but how do you think it operated differently this semester?

Lori Esposito

Oh man, I would have to say the visual culture in our streets – the protestors art – is a big inspiration in the experience of the workshop this semester. The visual culture – that local voice – is on display throughout the city. It's responsive to a moment. it is improvisational is a sense that it is responding in the moment to these communities and what's happening as historic markers in those spaces. I almost had a Catch 22 when watching the participants in the workshop when they were doing the writing – the large letters, the large writing. It brought me to the dialogues the text, the quotation the poetry, the manifestos that we have on our streets, surrounding us and our cities right now. That's one of the things that makes it really distinctive. They are quickly done. When you are working in the moment, or a short period of time to work, which is often the case in public spaces, you have to get that idea down quickly. You're not in a protective space of like a studio. I find that something, the urgency of the hand, the quickness of the hand in which text or the image is expressed. It's material and technique are beautiful and fascinating. I think that as you are sitting in traffic on the way to work in the morning, or as you are walking to the store, that it's becoming part of your language system as well.

Genevieve Wagner

Yeah, that very true. There is the work that you see downtown and the Short North, where protestors have made work– like the artists who are making work in the workshop are working around other people, and in the back of their mind they know that someone is going to be seeing this and taking inspiration from those around them, those just working around them. It really is – they are not working in their own studio, just thinking about what they wanna make, but rather just a response to what's around them.

Lori Esposito

Yes, exactly.

Genevieve Wagner

Wonderful. Just a closing question for you Lori: how can viewers implement improv into their daily lives, whether it be in work, school, play, or in artmaking?

Lori Esposito

Well... I am no expert on this. I think we are all improvising in a sense in our daily lives – especially now. like “okay, Zoom isn’t working, what’s plan B?” “Okay no school today, plan B.” And so, there is that kind of improvisation going on all the time., but I love this question because it acknowledges that there is a loss of routine or standard of some kind. It’s probably more true for some people than others, but I just wanted to say, that as an artist – as a performance artist – and also having had such incredible collaborations with dancers. which I think has impacted these kinds of projects for me which are very movement based, very improvisational. Dancers. and musicians have shared a lot of those vocabularies with me. One of the things that we have connected on is that it is more exhausting to stop yourself from expressing form movement or art maintaining, from restraining expressions of yourself. Its these efforts of restraining these gestures each moment of every day that is exhausting. I don’t know if all people feel that way, but I feel like artists, and producers, and writers, makers, creators – to stop yourself from doing something else is exhausting. So, I try to give each student, you know, I have control of my own class -- if nothing else – but if there is a moment where I can get this to sort of enacting, to perform what is true for them, to express themselves in a moment, to not restrain themselves from being themselves in the class room, then that is a sign that they can bring themselves to class today. You don’t have to participate in the exhausting act of silencing yourself or not allowing yourself to enact on that thing you want to enact on. In that space, if we can achieve that as educators, then that’s when I think the real work can begin.

Genevieve Wagner

Wonderful. That’s a really wonderful situation to put your students in. To allow them to have this space to communicate how they are feeling, especially during these times. Thank you so much Lori. Once again you can view Lori Esposito’s show, Rapid Fire Text, at Hopkins Hall in person and you can go online to learn more about the show. Thank you again, Lori! It was wonderful to chat.

Lori Esposito

Thanks, Genevieve. It was great talking with you. Thank you.