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### Close Encounters: Performance Art, Politics & Technology

By **Kate Monahan**

This past July, NYU hosted *Encuentro 2003, Spectacles of Religiosities*, a ten-day event organized by the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics. The Institute is a consortium of institutions, artists, activists, and scholars from across the Americas dedicated to exploring the relationship between performance and social and political life in this hemisphere.

The Encuentro ("encounter," in Spanish) is an annual event<part seminar, part academic conference>that brings together the Institute's far-flung members in an investigation of a particular topic within this discipline. This is the first year that the event has been held in the United States; past years' Encuentros have been held in Brazil (2000), Mexico (2001) and Peru (2002).

This year's Encuentro focused on the interplay between religion and political power, and featured an impressive collection of lectures, live performances, installations,



Figure 1. At the *Encuentro*, as part of a Digital Photography Workshop taught by Lorie Novak, Chair of the Photography and Imaging Department (TSOA), participants select images to hang in their final photo exhibit. (Photo by Lorie Novak.)

discussions, and hands-on work-shops, many of which relied heavily upon multimedia and web technologies (see Figures 1 and 3). Various performances and installations utilized physical computing, digital projection, audio, video, online chat, or webcasting, often in innovative combinations.

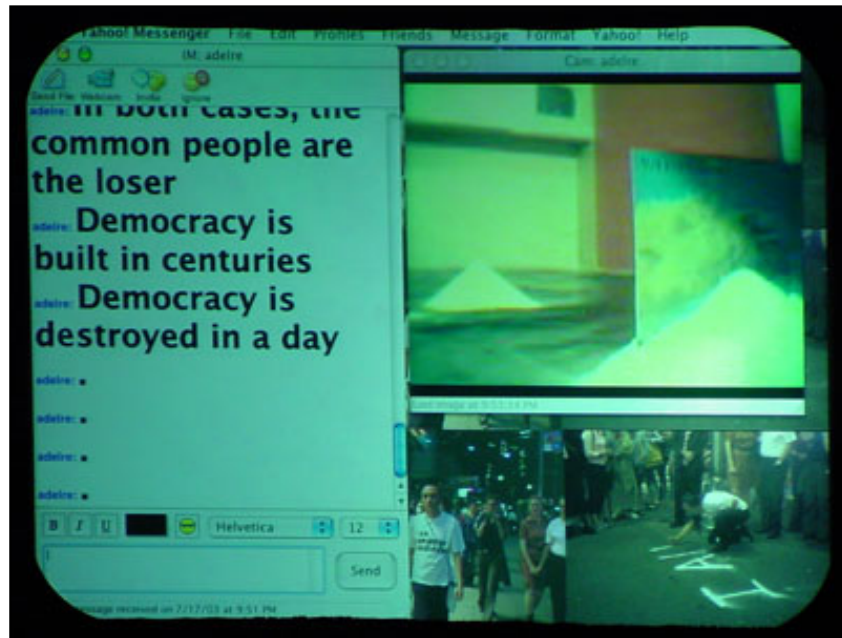


Figure 2. One of the projection screens during the webcast performance of the "Anti-War, Anti-Empire Cabaret". (Photo by Juan Ortiz.)

For example, as part of "The Anti-War, Anti-Empire Cabaret", ITS collaborated with the Institute to organize a two-way interactive webcast of an event which integrated sound, digital images, online chat, and simultaneous live performances by two physically distant artists—one in New York and another in Chile (see Figure 2). The event was an impressive demonstration of recent advances in Internet technologies, and effectively created a sense of fellowship between participants at the two remote sites through a shared experience.

### Closing the Distance with Internet Technologies

To build upon the sense of community and energy generated at each *Encuentro*, The Hemispheric Institute has developed a variety of ways to keep an active dialogue going throughout the year. Institute Director Diana Taylor emphasized the importance of communication via web technologies at the Encuentro 2003 welcome session at NYU's new Kimmel Center for University Life.

Demonstrating the Institute's website, <http://hemi.nyu.edu>, Ms. Taylor described how the consortium has used the Web to build community and facilitate collaboration across the great distances from which Institute members interact. The Institute's initiatives in this realm include a web-based Hemispheric course, online forums and a newsletter, online curations for multimedia materials known as "Web-Cuadernos", and a digital archive.

Explaining that one goal of the Encuentro is "to archive work, because this is often a failing of performance," Taylor led the welcome session attendees in a brief tour of the Institute's web-based archive (<http://hemi.nyu.edu/eng/archive/index.shtml>). This growing collection includes bibliographies, course materials and student projects, and a searchable video archive, produced in collaboration with ITS and NYU's Studio for Digital Projects and Research (<http://www.nyu.edu/studio/>), which

houses video interviews with performance experts and artists, and short performance excerpts. This archive not only preserves the often-ephemeral work of many performance artists and scholars, but also facilitates the sharing of ideas and artwork among community members through the easily accessible medium of the Internet.

Similarly, the Institute's Web-Cuadernos, available at <http://hemi.nyu.edu/eng/cuaderno.shtml>, are an online vehicle for idea exchange and development. As described on the website, these curations "focus on particular topics and/or bodies of work relating to performance and politics in the Americas. They contain combinations of photos, videos, texts, hyperlinks, bibliographies, and audio recordings." The Web-Cuadernos are ongoing works-in-progress, which community members are encouraged to add to, adapt, or create anew.



Figure 3. Techno Jesus, an installation created by one of the participants in "Mortuary Dioramas and Human Altars," a workshop led by Guillermo Gómez-Peña. (Photo by Marlène Ramírez-Cancio.)

Other online tools, including topic-based web-boards and discussion forums (<http://hemi.nyu.edu/eng/forums.shtml>), also help promote communication and collaboration among Institute members.

For more information about the Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics, visit <http://hemi.nyu.edu> or write to [hemisphere@nyu.edu](mailto:hemisphere@nyu.edu). For additional information about *Encuentro 2003: Spectacles of Religiosities*, please visit <http://hemi.nyu.edu/eng/seminar/usa/indexnyc.shtml>.

## References

- *Spectacles of Religiosities*, conference program, <http://www.hemi.nyu.edu/eng/seminar/usa/index2003.shtml>, July 2003.
- *Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics*, website, <http://hemi.nyu.edu>.
- "NYU's Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics to Hold its 4th Annual International Seminar & Summer Course in New York, July 11-19", NYU Press Release, [http://www.nyu.edu/publicaffairs/newsreleases/b\\_encuentro\\_2003.shtml](http://www.nyu.edu/publicaffairs/newsreleases/b_encuentro_2003.shtml), June 9, 2003.

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## Author Biography

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