

THE RACE

Collaborative Art-Making Meets Democratic Nation-Making

*You are in Washington DC.
You are driving.*

SHANNON
SCROFANO

*You turn on your radio and hear reports about the 2008 Presidential Election,
which is either days away or just past.*

MICHAEL
ROHD

*You are in Georgetown.
You park.*

*You are walking onto the campus of Georgetown University.
Glancing at newspaper boxes, you see the faces of Barack Obama and John
McCain.*

You walk into the Davis Performing Arts Center, located at the center of the campus.

You are going to see a performance called The Race.

But the show has already begun.

*Before you get your tickets, you notice performers reading at music stands placed
around the lobby. You carefully wander up to one; you hear an opinionated voice
supporting Obama. After several minutes, you realize that the performer is reading
an editorial from a newspaper in Michigan. And at a different stand, another per-
former reads one from Nebraska claiming McCain is the only way to go. When one
performer completes an editorial, they leave, replaced by another. You listen briefly;
you move on.*

*Ticket in hand, you walk into the Gonda Theater, a lovely modern 250 seat
Proscenium performance space. The space is practically bare. Red light on the back
wall. Two flat screen televisions hang suspended fifteen feet off the floor on both
sides of the stage. On one, ads from Republican Presidential candidates run in
chronological sequence from the beginning of the primaries through John McCain's
most recent spot. On the other screen, the Democrats, culminating with Obama.
The screens run with overlapping sound. Occasionally, a performer wanders onto
the stage; they watch, they listen, they move on.*

*You sit.
You wait.*

*And at 8:05 pm, the ads end, with both screens reading simultaneously:
Welcome to The Race. Please turn off your cell phones. Everything you are about
to see and hear is true. Except the parts that aren't.*

And the lights go out.



PHOTO: GEORGE ERNST

*Above: an image from
the pre-show action at
The Race.*

MICHAEL ROHD

Creator/Director, The Race; Sojourn Theatre Founding Artistic Director

In 2006, Derek Goldman, the head of Georgetown University's Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, approached me about a collaboration at Georgetown. He was interested in the work I had been doing with my ensemble-based company Sojourn Theatre. Founded in 1999 and based in Portland, Oregon, Sojourn Theatre is nationally acclaimed, making innovative original work with a commitment to civic

engagement. We both became excited at the possibility of a project to coincide with the 2008 Presidential election. We agreed it was a wonderful opportunity to engage the Georgetown community in what would surely be a significant period of national discourse. During the 2007–2008 Academic Year, I travelled back and forth to Washington DC to conduct workshops with students, faculty and community members, at times joined by my Sojourn collaborators Shannon Scrofano and Liam Kaas-Lents. The three of us all took up residency on campus for the Fall 2008 semester and, in addition to teaching classes at Georgetown, began an intensive rehearsal process with Georgetown students to create and produce *The Race*. The question at the heart of the investigation that was the process and the show: What does leadership mean today?

SHANNON SCROFANO

Designer/Media Artist/Collaborator, The Race;
Sojourn Theatre Company Member.

Georgetown was a tremendous laboratory space, inviting curiosity and bravery into the process at every juncture. My research and work as a designer and teacher in spatial practices and performance, particularly around issues of public space and democracy, first led me into collaboration with Michael and the company back in 2002. University residencies are such valuable pedagogical, collaborative, and creative experiments, a period of lateral traversals from the pages of theory into discussion spaces, through duration of performance event and back, many evolutionary times over. At Georgetown, we were fortunate to work with a sharp, enthusiastic department of students and educators.

MR Shannon and I work together in all kinds of settings. With our company, but also with other theaters, with universities...we are using collaborative processes and technologies to develop theatre productions, conference events, public dialogues. We work with dialogue a lot.

SS Which leads us to this dialogue. Let's get started. Much of what we do is described as "devised work." Why do you think devising has recently emerged as a more common means of creating performance?

MR For several reasons. In the moment we're in, the monolithic, monological presentation of singular point-of-view in the form of live performance has grown, to a degree, less interesting to more and more diverse audiences, and less satisfying to young artists looking to engage with a very complicated and fragmented world. Also, I think there is a renewed interest in collective activity and an exploration of non-hierarchical practices in art-making related to a sea change particularly among young people. There is an interest in moving beyond polarities and political partisanship. I think technology is facilitating an impulse of connectivity and co-authorship. The problems that we deal with today lead people, particularly artists,

towards bridge-building, I also think that theater technology and theater events are more and more, particularly for young artists, evolving into exciting alternative structures. You hear young artists talking about sporting events or elections or bars or chat rooms as places where an environment is created that they would like to emulate or touch somehow in their creation of performance events. Devising practices allow for more opportunities to develop those kinds of audience contracts than a traditional writer-driven performance event.

It's probably worth saying, at this moment, that devising is a jargony way of saying collaboratively-created original performance work that doesn't initiate with a set script. Yeah?

SS I can agree with that.

MR To get at your question more, about why it's being practiced more now, you have to look at the devising process not just as what happens in the room, but the rules and parameters and intentions with which you approach the research phase of a project. If artists are attempting to engage a complex, multi-voiced way of seeing the world, they have to be laying down a foundation of ideological diversity, a quest for ideological diversity as they begin to gather material and perspectives. If you do that, then you are bound by a tacit agreement as a maker not to cut the legs out from under the material that you've begun to generate; you have to take that material, give it voice, give it conceptual frameworks, give it space to be provocative, and you have to honor different voices and perspectives.

SS Right. So, in process, structure becomes functionally about tasks, about problem-solving with a given set of goals, parameters, limitations. This is critical thinking. Make a thirty-second monologue selling yourself as a candidate to the general public. Engage a stranger in an honest conversation about the choice to vote. Make your relationship with a TV news source two-way communication. Build a series of tests that demonstrate leadership abilities. Build a contract. Then, by generating questions, fill in the cracks. What do we still not know? What makes it possible for citizens to speak up? What makes them fearful or brave?

Devising structures are distinct democratic pockets in a process, which is particularly consonant within a project that is, in part, about the very questions of civic participation and leadership. Group Material describes an ideal democracy as "a system in which political power rests with the people: all citizens actively participate in the process of self-representation and self-governing, an ongoing discussion in which a multitude of diverse voices converge."¹ Devising as a process for the performers, and civic theater as event for an audience-

¹ Wallis, Brian. *Democracy: A Project by Group Material*. Seattle: Bay Press/Dia Art Foundation (NY), 1990.

participant community are “open work” which “tends to encourage ‘acts of conscious freedom’ on the part of the performer and place him at the focal point of a network of limitless interrelations, among which he chooses to set up his own form.”²

2 Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989.

*You are a student at Georgetown University.
You are also a performer in a show called The Race.*

*It’s the second week of rehearsal.
September 2008.*

This evening, you are exploring the relationship between leadership, personality and performance. In particular, you are examining how a close-up on film or video affects the performance of personality, and by extension, how leadership qualities are perceived. You think about this knowing that most people voting for Presidential candidates will only know the people they are voting for in this manner—on a screen.

You are invited to imagine—what if someone only knew you as a presence on a screen? Not a character that you were playing, but what if they only saw “the real you” as a mediated two-dimensional image. And then, you ask yourself, what if they only knew you through the moments of your daily life that someone else chose—what would an edited version of your actions, your facial expressions, your words, look and sound like?

What version of you might be created?

*If the intention was to make you look good, what aspects would be highlighted?
If the intention was to slander you, what might be shown?*

And then you are asked to construct your own version of you for the camera.

Imagine you are a candidate. Not a fictional one, but yourself, as a candidate. What of who you are could effectively be highlighted to present “leader”?

Your task is to prepare a sixty-second monologue, as if you are that constructed, heightened version of your personality that you will deliver straight into a camera in another room. The rest of the cast will watch that video as its broadcast live in the theater.

*You have ten minutes to work on this.
And it’s hard.*

Because knowing how other people see you is difficult enough—knowing how to arrange that perception with a specific intention...some say we do that every day, moment to moment, with attention paid to relationships and desires. But we don’t consciously make every one of those choices.

Here, you have to do just that.

Which is what a politician has to do—every waking moment.

MR Ideally, in a devising context, particularly when your content is contemporary public material and public perspectives and public dialogue—whether you are trying to catalyze that or just use that as your starting impulse—your pre-production work is significantly different than that which occurs with a text-based play. As opposed to understanding the skeleton of your text and then finding your staging concept, you're trying to understand the bones of the idea or ideas you are exploring. You are trying to find ways to bring the questions you are working with into the room in three main structures. One, you're trying to find game structures that can lead to architectural, dramaturgical, and conceptual discoveries. Two, you're trying to find scoring structures, which can lead to physical and choreographic discoveries and worlds and patterns. And three, you're trying to create set or composed material—so you need to come in with activities that are going to be conceptually and dramaturgically related to your content. For example, if you're working on the election, you immediately know that one of your starting points is the notion of choice. Now you can work backwards, who gets to choose, what does it mean to choose, what if you don't choose, and you can work forwards—what will you choose, how will you do the choosing, what do you do after you choose. But the actual action of choosing becomes a meaty thing that is not going to give you “hey, here are the tools I used last time I made a show,” but “how am I going to discover structures to work with this group of collaborators around the notion of choosing?” And then, if you're really doing your work collaboratively with a group, and you want the performance to continue to maintain the investment and ownership



PHOTO: GEORGE ERNST

Above: Performers in The Race facilitating a connection between the audience in the theater and a woman one thousand miles away via iChat

that the room maintained during the generative process, you're trying to create ways that allow your starting questions to live actively within the performance event itself. For example, you're trying to make moments in which your performers and/or your audience choose *during* the event, as opposed to lots of discoveries about choices and then simply performing your discoveries about choices. You're trying to make a space where discovery can consistently happen, but it is still

set or composed or authored: the openness or set-ness of those structures—that's really what you're trying to find in your devising process.

Early in the process, when we started working with cameras and projections of the human face as ways to really try to look in the eyes of someone trying to convince us of something or trying to be present and true and authentic.... I feel as if we began an interest, a pursuit of the human face in close-up that maintains a very important relationship to the process of examining leadership in a media-based society, but also to the role of the performer in a theatrical event. We discovered that in the first week of rehearsal. That pursuit took us to some specific form and dramaturgy choices as we developed the piece.

SS That relationship held; it manifested in more presentational contexts, in more participatory contexts, and in instances that worked to bridge those two conditions as well.

MR Right. If we think about this pedagogically for a moment, this kind of work enables fruitful improvisation within the performance, and then certainly within the development of the performance. We are creating an environment where our collaborators, the artist-students, have to develop critical thinking skills and decision making skills to quickly, consistently make choices based on impulses and on taste throughout our process—that is a wonderful space for student artists. The skills that they have to display and nurture and actively utilize in this process are those that make imagining choices and moments of their own lives and taking action more possible. They're basically building muscles for decision-making and action.

SS That's a great segue into talking about the use of technology, both in election-related content, and as a tool of the devising process. Would you talk about our starting place for technology in the project?

MR From the beginning, we knew, through conversation, that we were less interested in technology as a presentation mode, and more interested in it as a connecting and distance-bridging mode. And before we even got there, we were talking about this national chorus and how to bring people from around the country or world into the room real-time. It manifested—design-wise, and how we built it into the dramaturgy—as a series of discoveries. But the impulse which initiated the use of technology—that did not change. I was not surprised by how we were using it; I was simply delighted by the discovery of manifestation and contextualization.

SS We live in a nation that is geographically large—large enough to create remarkably diverse regionalisms, and illuminate surprising commonalities in incredibly diverse circumstances—large enough to hold over 300 million people, all separately wrestling with their unique and

shared American identities. Technology is only one bridge, but a bridge that is increasingly familiar. It's my nonna awed by Skype transporting my brother across the country into the room on Thanksgiving or my two-year-old nephew adeptly navigating my iPhone to find the Koi Pond. These are points of simple connection and delight, but multi-media tools are merely a container-vehicle in this miraculous and brief space we have with technology, before the computer brain surpasses our human version. As a container, the tools have become flashier, more spectacular at every turn, but also more invisible, more familiar and integrated into the landscape. This is the space to which we are drawn. Not the television or the DSL connection, but the visible living room in Florida, the office in Seattle, the dorm room in Taiwan. Real places holding real people, delivered in real time towards the end of a conversation, a point of connection between wide worlds.

MR How does technology simplify and complicate notions of dialogue that deepen student learning when developing artistic event-based discourse?

SS I'm interested in an evolutionary use of technology—that echoes dramaturgy in constructed conditions but also in integrated participation structures, a use of technology that speaks directly to and acknowledges the range of perceived access and familiarity with technological forms, which are, again, a means and not an end. Technology is now our situation, both potential and manifest. Even if you are standing in the middle of the Sahara, with no evidence of post-industrial society for hundreds of miles, technology has irrevocably altered your psychology of expectation. So if we accept it into our landscape, integrated into most of the planes and cracks of our times, as artists we are charged to negotiate with that technology in an event tied in dramaturgy to communication, to media and presentation, to electoral circumstance and leadership.

Technology is like architecture—you meet its associations head on, and navigate an embrace or subversion. Advertisements in dialogue with each other in simultaneity, re-appropriation of the twenty-four hour news cycle, reaching between vetted truth and media sound-bite, into the individual and collective conscience of people, saying: “Here's what I think. What I want in a leader. Why I don't trust politicians. Why I want to be elected to political office someday. Why I am disappointed, afraid, hopeful.” The transmission of that honesty in the same physical shape—4:3 ratio, via the same mechanical messenger, that rectangular plastic and metal box that is our primary source of information—changes our relationship to these tools. You can't trust or mistrust a television, a computer, a camera... it's what comes through those devices. To send a moment of authenticity along those channels is no small thing. It can create or sever intimacy, messenger

and message in dynamically shifting, often volatile relationships.

You are a public housing activist in Chicago.

You have an amazing life story; your work for social justice and human dignity has been accomplished and recognized.

It is 7pm Chicago time on the Friday night after Barack Obama was elected this nation's first African American President. You are in your home in front of a laptop computer your friend and colleague has brought over. You have just done a technical run through with someone on a laptop at Georgetown University—you could see and hear them; they could see and hear you. It seemed they were in a room like yours. You are told they are sitting in a large theater. Soon, that theater will be full.

It is 7:45 Chicago time. The laptop in front of you comes to life, and someone you can't see whispers to you- "it's almost time."

You sit patiently.

You are about to join The Race's National Chorus.

And then, you see the face of a young man, college age, looking at you. He's all you can see. But you know he's in front of a crowd. As he asks you—"Hi there, welcome. Would you please introduce yourself to everyone?"—you can tell, there is more energy on the other side of this screen than one small face would lead you to believe.

You introduce yourself.

Though you can see yourself in a small box down in the lower right hand corner of your screen, you have been told ahead of time that the audience in the theater is watching you on a large television monitor. Which is strange. But, you are no stranger to crowds.

You are asked three questions. You answer each.

The third question is—"if you had one minute with President Elect Obama, and you could tell him anything you wanted as he prepares to take office, what would it be?"

And you smile.

You say—"I had one minute with President Elect Obama—I know President Elect Obama. I can tell you what I told him."

And you hear through the small speaker on your laptop the sound of hundreds of people laughing, and even cheering a bit.

The young man says—"Please, do!"

You tell him—"I told him that we needed him to be thinking about the rest of us

out here. Not to forget where he's spent the last ten years, not to forget the things he's been fighting for. I told him good luck. And that we'd be watching. And doing our part. That's what I told him. And some other things, but that's just between us."

More laughter.

"Thank you so much."

Applause.

"It's my pleasure."

You are then told that on another large screen onstage, the audience can see a young man in Detroit.

You can hear him, but you can't see him.

You are invited to pose a question of your own.

To him.

You ask what he hopes for when this new president takes office.

He tells you, and everyone else in the room.

The college student who has been your host then thanks you, and says goodnight.

You say—

"Goodnight."

More applause.

And it's over.

On your side of the screen.

In a theater in Washington DC, hundreds of people you don't know are thinking about what you just said.

And their evening continues.

SS Do you think there is a distance between comfort levels with technology as medium or content for a student population versus a collaborative audience experience where the viewers may be diverse in age? Does that distance affect dramaturgy?

MR I think that is relevant only if you are going to ask the audience to participate in an execution of technology; in terms of a presentational use of technology, the difference is negligible because people have

become so used to spectacle being technologically virtuosic. If you are going to ask them to engage with something like karaoke technology, it's very comfortable because it's such a familiar public activity... if you ask them to accept someone being filmed, it's easy, they're used to it at every family gathering. Now, it might be awkward for a moment, if you were to suddenly ask somebody to pick up a camera and start filming, or to take a laptop and be responsible for executing a task while being watched by an entire audience. If their involvement, with equipment feels more public than private, that can be daunting. But in general, as a tool, as a spectacular tool, I don't think there's much there in terms of distance.

SS I don't know. I still believe there is so much of technology that feels inaccessible to certain portions of the population, and can be alienating, not just in attempts to interact with it, but also in attempts to observe. Perhaps that is sensitivity corrupting me. I'm fascinated by this space we're in. Technological generations are a tiny fraction of human generations. I consider someone four years younger than me to inhabit a different technological generation than my own. Separate from a facility level, I think there is a fundamental psycho-social difference. Expectation, integration: it is an entirely different reality for each of these generations. Access and economics certainly plays into this as well, but that aside for a moment.... Take an adult audience. Where previously you had people 16-96, up to four generations, but more likely three, you now arguably have up to twenty generations. It's impossible to account for the nuances of this condition any more than it is possible to exhaustively consider the geographic, economic or ideological diversity in a given room. Like you said, though, we embrace this diversity in our intention—and that is a pivotal difference. Not as an act of accommodation or assimilation, but because it's a tremendous privilege to do so. Student artists are in a remarkable and deliberate position to expand their perspective; technology can blend into their social and educational lives in exclusive rather than inclusive ways. The point is not to use iChat for the sake of that technology; the point is to use iChat because there isn't another way to get the woman who leads a seniors activist group in Wisconsin into the room, and we need her face, her words to reach us, or to have an exchange opportunity between an African American student in southern Alabama and a musician in Los Angeles. The extraordinary muscle of that media is functional above the spectacle factor you mention. These are the tools of emerging artists, and their ability to explore them bravely, richly, and with the depth with which they are investigating the content and capacities of the other facets of their art and social practices.

In that way, perhaps technology is a creative language bridge as well, not unlike physicality, which is also a significant layer in the kind of performative work we do.

- MR Sure. I think that, for the performer, physicality is an important way to access material that is not just intellectual. Again, let's go back to the idea of choice. If we think about choice, or leadership for that matter, we can talk about it; but to embody an image, to undertake motion, to engage in action... these are significantly different ways to understand an idea. Then we consider not just the participant/performer, but the viewer: they see actions and images and motion and have an ability to read bodies, to interpret, with different openness than when they are given spoken language as their sole mode of access."The body in space takes us to things in a more visceral way, both for the person doing it and for the person watching it. I think it's a wonderful way to get a sense of community. It's one thing to listen to ten performers speak; it's another to watch them move. Not always better or more, but different. And it makes for an experience that is certainly entirely different than 95% of the experiences students have in educational systems, and, is different in terms of an audience coming to deal with something that they think is about politics and matters of the mind—and finding that the body is supremely engaged in those matters as well.
- SS For me, physicality is inevitably about alternative relationships to architecture and site. It is about de Certeau's notion of the everyday, walking through the city, consumption of social space, and about investigating existing (conscious or unconscious) relationships to the spaces we move through or remain within. Performance offers a sanctioned space to defy accepted ways of being in or moving through space—whether that means walking up walls, remaining motionless for nine hours, or falling from the sky, in addition to pedestrian physical relationships to other bodies, be they performer or viewer. This extends contractually to the viewer-participant, creating awareness of the visible or invisible space we take up in relation to each other. From there, it is a short leap to issues of equity and democracy.
- MR What role does exploration of site/space play in the pedagogical and artistic process when creating devised work with students?
- SS Site/space is a full collaborator, which makes it both teacher and taught in collaborative ideals. There is a basic consciousness and curiosity of space that I am interested in cultivating with students—with everyone for that matter—a way of committing to being aware —aesthetically and functionally—of the fullness of our occupation of and impact upon space. It is another means to strengthen the observation and imagination muscles of an artist, and our consciousness, and for that matter conscience, in the equation of consumption creates value and depth to that experience. Space and site, whether man-made or not, are more than weather barriers or container-assistants, and authentic engagement with a space can range from the incredibly simple to the infinitely complex. A space has a physical life to be explored by a cre-

ative ensemble: Can you balance on the railings? Is there anywhere to hide? Does it feel immediately intimate or impossibly expansive? Are the tin ceilings a hundred years old? It also has a functional and social life, with which there are countless associations for people when they enter it. In devised work, as in post-dramatic work, generation occurs laterally such that a discovery about a physical sequence may become the basis of an entire scenic landscape, or the shape of a projection could be the origin of many pages of text. Progress isn't singularly sourced, but rather it multiplies free form, particularly in the early stages of beginning a work. As a fully functioning partner, a space brings its baggage and gifts and requires an open contract with all who occupy it, audience and creative team alike. The process of committing a site to participation in a performative event is an act of opening that space to the formally impossible, the dramaturgically surprising, to alternative interactivity: site as participation.

MR In our work, familiar public settings/activities can playfully engage audience members in participatory group experiences, where strangers are gently invited to an unexpected level of exchange. And, a spectrum of performer/audience relationships (watcher/watched, host/guest, guide/participant) has required our growing expertise in navigating audience members between watching, choosing, and doing—which was especially interesting here, because in *The Race* our site was a traditional theater space. However, we moved the audience along a journey...they begin in one seat as watchers, and they end in another seat, onstage, as participants. They went from listener to speaker, in a sense.

SS Sites of voice, yes? Making conversation spaces. Can the physical composition or attributes of a space cultivate participation? Do we see these spaces differently in the aftermath of having used them as active sites of dialogue? Can we build performance events that are interactive, open, anarchic, generous, patient, urgent, expansive, curious and full of hospitality — the same as the shapes of our learning communities? Places where difference comes together and is made transparent and more powerful in community acknowledgement of it? Places where unlikely commonalities are revealed, via investment in a collective progress? “Communication occurs in reciprocity: it must never be a one-way flow from the teacher to the taught. The teacher takes equally from the taught. So it oscillates—at all times and everywhere, in any conceivable internal and external circumstance, between all degrees of ability, in the work places, institutions, the street, work circles, research groups, schools—the master/pupil, transmitter/receiver, relationship.”³ Directly synched to Friere’s challenge to educators, that “those whose political dream is to reinvent society have to fill up the space of the schools, the institutional space,”⁴ and I would say, turn them into sites of voice.

3 Beuys, Joseph. "I am Searching for a Field Character." *Art into Society, Society into Art*. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1974.

4 Friere, Paulo. *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*. Westwood: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1987

- MR What is the relationship between public space as a potential site of democracy, and art-making as a potential site of collaboration?
- SS Intention. The relationship, analogous or divergent, between public space as a potential site of democracy and art-making as a potential site of collaboration is intention. Collaboration, art making and democracy alike do not exclude conflict, diversity of opinion, negotiation—and while they do not require consensus, they understand that each of these may be part of the equation at certain points. What is required is participation, investment, and honesty, and to be idealistic about all of it. I suspect both can/could/do still function without honesty to some degree. Certain spaces are contrived as public space—whether through aesthetic or civic intent, others come to a condition of public space by serendipitous circumstances. Art-making processes often, but not always, begin with intention.
- MR Intention is a really important idea here. In the teaching-learning community at a liberal arts school, which is what Georgetown is, our primary intention is not just to train artists—it is, through the process of art-making, to impart and exchange experiences and skill sets that are going to be useful to making good citizens and scholars and human beings. In the development of an ensemble—which is a collaborative community of its own, a group of artists working together to make something to put out into the world— a tremendous number of skills need to be brought to bear on the tasks involved. Collaborators need to listen, and they need to make offerings—they need to make choices and be responsible for those choices. They need to explore their own vision and point of view. They need to be willing to have voice and also to negotiate voice/authority. And they need to utilize that set of skills to affirm what they know, and discard what they no longer know. It's a fascinating contradiction in a setting committed to the acquisition of knowledge— an artist has to live safely (though not comfortably) in uncertainty. Students learn that being off-balance is a necessary part of developing one's work. And, a necessary part of collaboration. What do I come into the ensemble knowing, and what does the ensemble teach me? If I'm open to being impacted in the process, I am going to change. Change is frightening, and utterly necessary for true learning. An ensemble makes that teaching-learning activity extremely powerful.
- SS Ensemble is entrenched in collaboration — in a willingness to make that offering to a public dialogue, the trajectory or result of which is potentially unknown, and by extension into the rehearsal or class room, choosing to contribute generously, to participate in healthy and productive critical feedback models, in essentially subjective situations. The most remarkable moments of this are when everyone

feels authorship of the product; yet the product/idea is almost untraceable because it has been authentically processed through a collective. This is absolutely critical in the collaborative, multi-authored creative process, cultivating that open participation, because the product — the performance event—lives both inside and outside of the individuals that created it, as a series of transfers in time. Give it away, give it away, give it away. The process should prepare you for the act innate in the event. Methodologically, the process mirrors performance that has participatory or civic engagement elements even further, in that the performance structures, score, and landscape are all set-up for moments of uncertainty that rely largely on generosity and making a choice to speak or contribute. As the completion takes place, with actual audience, authorship-ownership is then extended from the group that created the event, to the group that has experienced it, and in the best scenarios, those groups blur, paving the way for authentic and deep investment in forwarding a conversation.

Michael, does the specific nature of your creative practice strengthen your teaching in surprising ways?

MR I think my creative practice is focused on leveraging the distinct assets and perspectives of everyone in a room, and leading the creation of something that can only happen because of that particular combination. I find that incredibly energizing—to author a series of moments that are dynamic, mysterious and connective due to the collective ownership of a group of people who are pursuing something together. And I hope that my delight in that phenomenon strengthens my teaching through a translation of that focus on a space with the intention of learning. I am constantly re-learning that, if I treat the classroom/studio as a space with as much possibility as a rehearsal room, discovery will present itself—for me and my students.

You are in the Gonda Theater at Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

It is 9:30pm on a Saturday.

Eighty minutes ago, you would have said you were watching a play.

That was before the part

when you watched ten performers ask and answer questions that they had never seen before in a ballet of interrogation that eventually included the audience.

That was before the part

when you and the entire audience watched bleachers appear onstage and then

found yourself ushered onto them, becoming less a group of spectators and more a crowd at a rally.

That was before the part

when the audience was invited to karaoke political speeches from every major candidate in the 2008 Presidential election.

That was before this part now,

at 9:30,

which finds you listening to music

watching the same ten performers executing a gently acrobatic dance on folding tables and finds you speaking into a microphone being passed throughout the audience

as projections on a giant screen invite you to complete one of the following sentences: "I feel hopeful about-"

or

"I am fearful of-"

So now

eighty minutes later

not completely certain how you went from being an audience member to a participant but, feeling quite certain that the journey you took was crafted with great care you would say that you didn't see a play.

You would say that

along with a bunch of strangers

you were part of a conversation.

WORKS CITED

Beuys, Joseph. "I am Searching for a Field Character." *Art into Society, Society into Art*. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1974.

Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989.

Friere, Paulo. *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*. Westwood: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1987

Wallis, Brian. *Democracy: A Project by Group Material*. Seattle: Bay P/Dia Art Foundation (NY), 1990.