

AFTER THE SHOW



Postcard for *After the Show*, design by Gavin Kroeber, New York, 2011. Photo: Courtesy of Ian Ference / Kingston Lounge.

ROBERT QUILLEN CAMP

GAVIN KROEBER

AFTER THE SHOW

A Play Based on Actual Events

ADAPTED BY ROBERT QUILLEN CAMP AND GAVIN KROEBER

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF
(DRAMATIS PERSONAE)

JIM FINDLAY, *director, designer, writer, creator*

TEDDY BERGMAN AND STEPHEN SQUIBB,
artistic directors of Woodshed Collective

AARON LANDSMAN, *playwright*

MARC ARTHUR, *artist*

KATIE PEARL, *director, playwright, and
co-artistic director of PearlDamour*

KENNETH COLLINS, *interdisciplinary artist
with Temporary Distortion*

DAVID CONISON, *dilettante*

AYDEN GROUT, *artist, writer, and director of
documentation for Odyssey Works*

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After the Show premiered and closed on November 14, 2013, at the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center at the CUNY Graduate Center, New York, NY, Frank Hentschker, executive director and director of programs.

CAMP AND KROEBER

ALEC DUFFY, *theater director and artistic director of JACK in Brooklyn, New York*

YELENA GLUZMAN, *artist, editor, and scholar*

KARINNE KEITHLEY SYERS, *playwright, choreographer, and publisher*

SHANNON JACKSON, *scholar*

DAVID LEVINE, *artist*

ERIC DYER, *cofounder of Radiohole*

After the Show curatorial intern, Rebecca LeVine; production intern, Jessica Katz.

NOTE: In the original production, the role of KATIE PEARL was played by Morgan Spector.

Robert Quillen Camp and Gavin Kroeber in *After the Show*, Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, New York, 2013. Photo: Stephanie Hafer

PRESHOW

During the day prior to the performance, roundtable discussions are held to discuss one or more of the questions that haunt After the Show.

PRELUDE

Lights up. GAVIN KROEBER and ROBERT QUILLEN CAMP enter and stand center. GAVIN addresses the audience.

GAVIN Okay, thanks everybody. Thanks for being here. So we thought we would start with some text: (*Reading from notes.*) Why does the ostensibly experimental wing of the performing arts persist in making *shows*—rather than, say, encounters, parades, meals, businesses, vehicles, protests, games, or vacations?

Pause.

Why, after turning away from terms like *theater* and *drama* to the much-touted promiscuity of *contemporary performance* do so many artists predominantly perform for theatrical audiences in black boxes?

GAVIN looks up, then to QUILL.



AFTER THE SHOW

QUILL (*Reading from notes.*) We want to question the *show* as a form to get at important elements of theater that are often taken for granted. What are our presuppositions about what theater's formal horizons are? And how do those presuppositions affect the work that we make? What do we believe theater is or can be?

Must an audience arrive all at one time? Must the authorial divisions between audience and artist be so pronounced? Can theater happen in any architecture?

In the end, theatrical works are at the same time both determined by and responsible for the formal apparatus that is generally understood as their context. This event is organized around a simple question: could it be generative for theater artists to look to that context as a productive site for experimentation?

QUILL *looks at GAVIN.* **GAVIN** *looks first at the audience, then down to his notes.*

GAVIN There's a constellation of practices in the downtown theater scene that in one way or another are struggling against the formal constraints that are prevalent in the industry. This impulse seems to be shared by a fairly wide array of performing artists, but fairly often in isolation. It's rarely acknowledged. It's rarely given space.

QUILL Tonight we want to provide some modicum of space and see what happens. A series of interviews, case studies, proposals, and other contributions will trouble *showness* and consider the ramifications of that disturbance, attending to not only what might be gained but also what might be lost by abandoning the show. That is to say, tonight is a show about not making shows.

GAVIN So without further ado, let's start the show and get to the first contributor.

Blackout.

ACT I: PRACTICES & PROPOSALS

SCENE ONE: JIM FINDLAY

A slide reads "Jim Findlay."

GAVIN Ladies and gentlemen, Jim Findlay performing a solo research study for *Dream of the Red Chamber, a Performance for a Sleeping Audience*.

JIM FINDLAY *emerges from the audience wearing a coat and scarf and carrying a rolled up mat, a sleeping bag, and a large blue shopping bag. He heads upstage right, where he unrolls the mat, placing it near the upstage projection screen. He removes his coat and scarf. He places a pillow on the floor. He kicks off his shoes and unrolls the sleeping bag. He plugs various cables*



into the electrical outlets built into the podium. He puts on a headband with a built-in sleep monitor and connects it to a tablet, with its display facing the audience. He gets into the sleeping bag.

JIM *goes to sleep. He remains asleep for the duration of the play.*

GAVIN Ladies and gentlemen, Jim Findlay, whose study will be continuing as we progress.

Jim Findlay in
After the Show,
New York, 2013.
Photo:
Stephanie Hafer

CAMP AND KROEBER

SCENE TWO: WOODSHED COLLECTIVE

Lights shift. A slide reads "Woodshed Collective."

QUILL (*Reading from notes.*) Woodshed Collective creates site-specific theater productions such as *Hamlet Sequel in a Public Swimming Pool* and their adaptation of *The Tenant* in an Upper West Side church and parish house. For their upcoming "office project" which they are here to discuss, audience members will become employees of a life insurance corporation, navigating actual office space and undertaking real



Teddy Bergman and Stephen Squibb of Woodshed Collective in *After the Show*, New York, 2013. Photo: Stephanie Hafer

work, but for a fictive employer, coping with scripted office politics. Please welcome Teddy Bergman and Stephen Squibb of Woodshed Collective.

Hold for applause. TEDDY BERGMAN and STEPHEN SQUIBB enter and shake hands with QUILL and GAVIN. Everyone sits.

So, right away we want to distinguish what you're doing from a project like *Sleep No More* in which the audience engages as voyeurs—they can mark their own path in

space but there's only so much that's asked of them. Your piece requires labor on the part of your audience. Could you speak to that and why that's important to your conception of the piece?

STEPHEN Sure. So before addressing that distinction I'll flag one other important one: we use text—we have a scripted text. They have a running track that they use but there's no text to my knowledge.

But, yes, the question of labor has always been an issue for art, so I'll make a couple metapoints about it before speaking specifically to our show. As far back as someone like Sidney, in his "Defense of Poesy," we have the idea that art makes the labor of education easy to digest. It goes down easily, so that rather than having to labor as you might in an authoritarian or disciplinarian educational institution, art is a much more pleasant way of relieving the spectator of that labor.

Brecht takes that and inverts it and actually would like his audience to labor, to do the labor of reflection, and we are often asking our audience to do work in one form or another—I think especially in a strange Puritan country like America.

So on one level, asking the audience to invest labor simply takes these histories and lodges them at the formal center of the show.

The other metapoint is that there is a real debate about whether intellectual labor is the same as manual labor, and there are two sides: one side says that in fact intellectual labor is absolutely the same as physical labor—in fact, it is more exploitative, what is known as "superexploitative" because it consumes all of a person.

The other side says that, actually, no, intellectual labor is less exploitative, more free, and that in fact the extent to which offices or even factory floors now involve the intellectual labor of the workers involved is

a result of struggle and organization on the behalf of workers, so we have to view the arrival of an intellectual labor paradigm as a step on the way to freedom.

I don't know which one of those I agree with, but by putting labor, specifically office labor, at the center of the show, we're interested in asking to what extent our audience feels more or less free as a result of that fact.

TEDDY If we're looking at something like *Sleep No More* or something that's explicitly more voyeuristic, I would want to flag the way we're trying to make a show interactive and the way I think some of our shows are sort of indebted to the experience of playing video games, which are media that give people a tremendous capacity to create their own stories. Although you may be physically immersed in a space in *Sleep No More* or something more voyeuristic, you're just getting multiple things to look at as opposed to actually participating within and affecting their outcome.

I think we want to try to place and implicate and—to use a *show* word or a more traditional theatrical practice word—try to cast our audience within the world of the show, so that their presence is accounted for.

QUILL And can you say just a little more about how the audience might affect the outcome, how that might work?

STEPHEN Sure. The show is largely in some sense authored by the audience, by each audience member. The idea is to have them author their own experience within a set of parameters. And the extent to which those parameters are more or less obvious or more or less clear is something we go back and forth on.

But quite literally they could have an assignment to go to the third floor to photocopy nude pictures of their boss, and

they can either choose to do that or not choose to do that. And depending on whether or not they choose to do that, their experience will be very different.

TEDDY How successful do you want to be in our business, you know?

QUILL Right.

STEPHEN And what does success mean to you?

GAVIN So you have this structure that can be navigated, and presumably people can come back on any given night and find a different route through that structure. You've said that in your early development process you indulged the possibility of adopting something like a live action role-playing model in which people could work their way up the company ladder across multiple performances—they would have a different position, be promoted within the office, and actually be in a different structure each time. This would be similar to video game durationality, but ultimately you chose a duration that's more or less conventional in terms of theater.

Obviously, some of that decision is about totally understandable logistics, but you also mentioned that some of it came out of the type of narrative that you felt you could create. And so I wanted to ask two questions:

What would make those *longue durée* logistics worth tackling for you? And on the other hand, what is it you prize or enjoy about the *show* as a format, about that particular duration as a vessel for narrative—as opposed to the types of narrative that could be created in a video game or multivisit live action role-playing game?

TEDDY Well, a very practical initial response is that I want people to stay longer, to go through the show longer. The business is a life insurance office, so you're dealing with the

CAMP AND KROEBER

value of people's lives. We've been developing a lot of material for the show that's about questions of death, your own life, and the way you value your own life and the life of others. I think those kinds of questions take time.

When you go to a show that is two and a half hours, you're going to give it those two and a half hours (unless you walk out). The expectation for something really durational, something functioning more like an art installation, perhaps, is more to go into it for fifteen minutes and then leave. Getting to hold people's attention and set up their expectations to engage with it for a longer period of time, getting to see a question develop and unfold in many different spaces and parallel narratives—to my mind, it emboldens an audience a little more rather than just stepping in and being like “well, I know I'm only going to go in for a little piece.” This more traditional duration is actually a means of engaging them more. I think it's useful in that way.

STEPHEN Yeah. What would make it worth it? If we had the resources, I would do it in a heartbeat. I would love to build a show that actually has no performers, that just cast a bunch of audience members that don't realize the entire cast is audience members who show up to work every day, live out their lives in this performance-slash-job. That would be dynamite. But we can't do that right now.

In defense of the show, I will say that I actually believe in the realist theater. I love realist theater—but realist theater is not available to us right now in the way that it was historically. So formal experimentation is one way to recover the possibility of realism in the same way that, to use a really over-the-top example, Joyce uses formal experimentation with *Ulysses* to recover the effect of the realist novel from forty years earlier.

So the show remains in some sense a space of realist encounter that is enabled by this intense formal experimentation. We can be psychologically realistic again because we have an audience that runs around and believes they're part of a company, that sort of thing.

TEDDY If we were to be really mimetic about creating an office, and we were just having this thing operating nine to five, that would preclude people with full-time jobs from experiencing our show, and considering we're making a show about an office, that would seem like a real shame to me, that only people who worked at night or freelancers could come. The question would get a lot less interesting to me.

GAVIN (*To the TIMEKEEPER.*) How much time?

(*To TEDDY and STEPHEN*) We're finished. Ah, and I had a great follow-up. Well, we had a great time. Thank you very much.

TEDDY Thank you.

Blackout. Lights shift.

SCENE THREE: AARON LANDSMAN

A slide reads “Aaron Landsman.”

In the darkness, a video plays. The frame of the black-and-white video is filled by the head of AARON LANDSMAN, who addresses the audience.

AARON Hey there. Sorry I cannot be with you tonight. But here's the thing: I am flying over your heads in an airplane right now, and you are hearing me read this.

This is your invitation to my new project called *Perfect City*. I'm going to be working on it for another two to three years. *Perfect City* is about two things: first, the



Aaron Landsman in *After the Show*, New York, 2013. Video still courtesy of Aaron Landsman

way many cities—London, New York, São Paulo, Portland, the list goes on—are using seemingly progressive values like green space, walk- and bikeability, local food access, and public transit to create places that are exclusive to all but the very wealthy.

Second, it's about how we might respond differently to the same set of questions depending on who's doing the asking. I don't know how those two things relate, but that's what the process is supposed to show me.

I also don't exactly know the forms it will take—ideally it might include things like:

One: A publication you read on your way to work, using public transit, in the kinds of cities the project is about. It will be made up of images and interviews describing other people's utopias, ideally people both similar to and different from you. Maybe there's an audio version for drivers. Maybe cyclists have to wait until they get somewhere safe.

Two: A one-on-one booth where you are given the choice to ask a conversation partner questions or repeat recorded texts to each other. I'm thinking that there will be some kind of participatory structure here. You come to the booth and are paired with someone, you and this person have someone you know in common, and through that person you introduce yourselves to each other for a couple of minutes, and then you do one of the possible assignments. This idea evolved out of an accident that happened with a couple of friends at my showing at the Segal Center's PRELUDE festival this fall.

Three: A play in a theater. Crazy, right? This might include dyspeptic musical numbers and monologues told in a kind of subverted "love-my-autobiography" style. Maybe for the play there will be fifteen seats available to the general public each night, and if you come to the show by that traditional means, you'll get there and there will be fourteen other

CAMP AND KROEBER

people with you who came that same way, but otherwise the space will be filled with a curated public, meaning people who came because they were brought into the process at some earlier point, who are already in the conversation of the piece. Wait, doesn't that happen all the time anyway?

Four: Maybe there's an online installation, too, where you navigate planning an imagined city along with participants who have already been a part of one of the other iterations of the work. Maybe it looks like SimCity or something like that but the questions are poetic?

I think the different iterations of *Perfect City* will confirm what we've already done together, or tried to do, or talked about doing. Which means that the product will work best if most of the people who come to it have been part of the making. If we open it up to everyone, I think it will not succeed.

In other words, I don't think everyone needs to see this project's final realization. Is it possible to work with that idea in an *inclusive* rather than an *exclusive* way?

In other, other words, what are we assuming about the form or the audience when we start to make something?

The video ends. Blackout.

SCENE FOUR: MARC ARTHUR

Lights shift. A slide reads "Marc Arthur."

MARC ARTHUR *enters the stage and positions himself behind the upstage right podium. As he speaks, he advances slides on a laptop to accompany his presentation.*

MARC "A Proposal for Props." I propose a value consciousness for props as social objects of collective force that can commission meaning and validate temporality both inside and outside the structures of theater.

What if we relocated the prop to a singular event? In my latest work, *Mascot*, I was interested in how characters invoke Freud's reading of "fetish" as a sexual fixation through props. And how a pathological relationship to props can restructure the unique time of a performance.

Each performance of *Mascot* occurred with a new prop that was transformed during the time of performance and never used again. When the audience entered the theater, they encountered a white stage with black squares taped out around four objects, a bone, a glass, a box, and a canvas.

The actors fixated on these charged spaces and the props in them through encounters that served as references for movement and language. Rather than conventional drives and motivations, each character in *Mascot* had an obsessive and often sexual relationship with the props that determined their actions on stage.

The performance of the character with a compulsion for the canvas, for example . . .

MARC *gestures toward the projected image.*

. . . related to the canvas as if he were reading choreographic notation. Painted with thick coats of different-colored latex, the canvas was torn away at, like flesh, throughout the performance. By the end of the performance the canvas had been painted, destroyed, and repainted many times over, and the character had gone through a similar journey. Every character's drive was based on a relationship of evolving transformation to a prop, and so the props ended up orchestrating the narrative structure of the play. Rather than being relegated to pawns of the production, *Mascot* provided an opportunity to understand props as mobilizing forces of meaning and narrative within a performance.

Appropriating the qualities of sexual fixation and pathology from Freud's "fetish,"



for the purposes of *Mascot*, was an occasion to renegotiate the tenants of theatrical narrative structure and expand the transcendent power of the prop. However, I was not only interested in how the characters leased Freud's sexual overvaluation of objects to props, but how the audience might overvalue the props as well. In theater, the paradigmatic formula of exposition, climax, and denouement is embodied within the flesh of actors. These actors can seduce an audience to come along on their ride to catharsis. But when these staples of theatrical form emerge out of the props themselves, could the audience's foremost concern be the journey of the prop and not the actor?

MARC exits the stage. *Blackout.*

INTERLUDE: ANONYMOUS CONTRIBUTION.

In the blackout music plays, over which we hear a VOICE.

VOICE Drop acid.

Go to a busy thoroughfare and greet as many passersby as you can.

Go to the office of the city clerk and register as an apologist.

Spend an entire day trying to be self-conscious of everything you do.

Spend a day physically pointing at as many objects as you can.

Lights shift.

Marc Arthur in *After the Show*, New York, 2013. Photo: Stephanie Hafer

CAMP AND KROEBER

SCENE FIVE: PEARLDAMOUR

Lights up, bright. A slide reads “PearlDamour.”

GAVIN *enters and stands center. He alternates between looking at his notes and looking out at the audience.*

GAVIN Katie Pearl is half of the company PearlDamour, which creates site-specific works—including *Bird Eye Blueprint*, in which a generic office space was transformed into a whimsical and intimate experience for audiences of twenty at a time. PearlDamour is also responsible for *How to Build a Forest*, a 2011 art installation and durational theater piece in which audiences witnessed the construction and removal of a “forest” over the course of eight hours. We’ll be playing a time-lapse video of that hybrid experience during our interview. Please welcome Katie Pearl.

Applause. A time-lapse video of How to Build a Forest is projected.

KATIE *enters.*

KATIE and QUILL *sit. GAVIN stands upstage left.*

QUILL (*Reading from a transcript.*) So, in *How to Build a Forest* you foreground the labor of the performers—I guess they’re not so much performers as builders—and I’m wondering how that might relate to the making of the machinery of the space of the theater more transparent, how that might push against *showness*. Normally the show is just one little part of the larger production—it’s just the part we see, but we don’t know about all these other things that enable it.

KATIE (*Reading from a transcript.*) One of the seeds and core interests of this idea—and this is a lot, and some of it may be repetition from our last phone call—but that’s good, right?

QUILL Yeah, that’s great.

KATIE I just didn’t want to bore you. There were a couple of seeds leading into the project, and one of the seeds was something that Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill made us think about, which was how quickly things can be destroyed after they’ve taken years, centuries, millennia—a geological time scale—to come into being. And humans can kind of come along and end it right away.

That also made us think about how little we tend to look at. It made us think that we, in life and theater, we just tend to see the icing, we just see the thing people want us to see, and we don’t have access to the whole process that brought it there.

We were interested in this piece with equalizing the process and the product, and then we went one step forward and prioritized the process over the product. So our show, which lasted eight hours, six and a half hours of that was starting from a totally empty space, slowly constructing what you might think of as a complete product, a full installation. The forest and its ecosystem at its sort of climax moment lasted for half an hour, at which point the work stopped, and after that brief half an hour, taken away in one hour.

What we were inviting our audience to join us in was being with the building and then witnessing the destruction. So that was part of what we were interested in, in terms of exposing the labor of making something, and not only exposing it, but maybe the labor was the actual thing that had value and that had interest and caused an event to happen.

Simultaneous or parallel to that impulse, as a theater maker I also felt this crazy privilege of being a person who got to walk into a theater when it was exposed and in its state of potential. Like on the first day



Morgan Spector
as Katie Pearl of
PearlDamour in
After the Show,
New York, 2013.
Photo:
Stephanie Hafer

of load-in or the very beginnings of tech when the lights are on and nothing's been circuited yet so wires are hanging down everywhere, stacks of lumber are sitting around—the guys or women, people who aren't performers but who inhabit the space, the people who are building and the technicians, they're there doing their work. I always got sad that an audience never got to access that part of theater. They always get to see the final, finished product, and everything else goes away.

I wanted to make a piece where we could invite the audience into what is essentially like home for us in its bare-bones state so they could be with us as we feel that potential as we watch it build, as we start to recognize: “oh, fakeness is starting to happen,” or like: “the craft of the make-believe is starting to happen,” and “oh my god, there's a colored light that goes on and now the wings are disappearing because the stage is getting full.”

And at the same time as they are watching that, constantly reminding them that they're in a theater and unlike other experiences, they're in control of their movements. They can go wherever they want, and, you know, we're not interested in hiding or masking the process. We want them to get

extreme close-ups of it and then go back and get extreme distance. And those seemed like two investigations of the same impulse, which is: what's underneath, what's behind, what comes before, and how can we live in that together?

QUILL Great.

Pause.

Yeah.

Pause. He looks around.

I'm sorry. Gavin are you there? Did we lose Gavin?

GAVIN (*Stepping out of the shadows upstage.*)
Yes, I'm here.

QUILL (*Turning back to KATIE.*) So on another note, I'm wondering about the *closure* of the *show* as opposed to some other form that's bounded differently or isn't bounded at all.

KATIE We thought a lot about what boundary of time we wanted. What was the duration we wanted to put on this event? Was it going to be a two-hour piece? Was it going to be eight hours? Twelve? Was it going to be twenty-four hours? Was it going to go up on a Friday and be done on Sunday? What should it be? And eventually we landed on

CAMP AND KROEBER

eight hours because it has the significance of a workday to us. So in some ways the boundary of the duration is important to us, but I think there are a couple of reasons why the piece doesn't feel like a thing, a show.

One, because we haven't really figured out a way to write it down yet, so it doesn't exist on paper except as colorful hand-done bar graphs that tell each builder how when they're doing something, somebody else is doing this, and they should either trigger themselves or overlap. That's basically the script, a bar graph timeline of each cycle with no specific times attached, aside from some rare exceptions.

And the other reason it doesn't feel like a show is that there's no *event* other than what's happening in your experience.

So yes, something goes up and comes down if you stay for the whole thing, but it's incredibly open-ended in terms of narrative, and it's really generous and really hospitable in that way. I think some people could make the argument that it's less hospitable because it doesn't offer a narrative because it requires in some way more work, more labor from the audience to stay in contact with it over a period of time, but I think open-endedness is something that most writers and theater makers work with, even in traditional plays. It's the idea that you don't close the information gap—the audience can step in and close it for themselves. And in this piece we take that to the extreme.

It's so open-ended, and the little bits that provide tiny platforms for a narrative-based experience are sprinkled throughout very sparsely. When you leave, the show can't really close in your mind because it was never arching toward closure. Does that make sense?

QUILL Yes.

KATIE Can I say one more thing that just came into my mind? I was thinking about how why isn't this just a show—why wasn't

this project just a show? Why couldn't we make a ninety-minute or two-hour *play* play about it?

And I think that brings me to the idea which is if we were to make a ninety-minute play that people were to sit down and watch, it would have a very small and contained message to it. It would be a very small conversation because it would be like us just talking, however that looked for that amount of time.

People would be looking at it like, "Oh, what are they saying to me?"

And so the expansiveness of all our unknownness, the namelessness of our desire to make trees grow back or cities or mountains grow back or the bigness of our naïve hopefulness or our sorrow, which is a universal sorrow, about the fact that we seem to be killing the things that are helping us live—those are so big that they can only be contained in something that was endlessly permeable by an infinite number of people.

So that's what we attempted to do—like we could do eight hours. That woke some things up in people's minds. We created this iconic thing in our own way, and that woke up some things in people's minds. We invited people to slow down and be with us in those, those structures, and that woke up some things. And so it's the only way we could even attempt to have the conversation we wanted to have.

Pause.

GAVIN (*Moving toward center.*) I think that's a great last note.

QUILL Yeah. Thanks for making time for us.

KATIE Yep. Have fun next week.

GAVIN (*As KATIE exits the stage.*) Katie Pearl.

Applause. Blackout.

AFTER THE SHOW

SCENE SIX: TEMPORARY DISTORTION

A slide reads "Temporary Distortion."

In darkness, a silent video is projected. White text against a black background reads:

TEMPORARY DISTORTION

•

my voice has an echo in it

•

A six-hour, installation-based performance with live music, text, and video unfolding in an enclosed 24' 6" hallway.

•

A three-dimensional color rendering of the installation.

The following text is superimposed on black-and-white footage of the artists playing instruments inside the hallway:

All instruments are electric and plugged directly into the headphone system.

•

The drums are also electronic.

•

No sound can be heard without headphones.

•

The piece uses live instruments, spoken text, and song to create a complex and densely layered soundscape of synchronous and multilayered tracks.

•



•

Spectators watch through two-way mirrors, listen to the performance through headphones, and are free to come and go throughout the duration of the event.

•

The rendering of the hallway viewed from another angle.

•

The following text is white against a black background:

While the audience can see inside the box, the performer sees only his reflection in the two-way mirrors, stretching off infinitely in both directions.

•

An image of a guitarist inside the hallway faced by his own reflection.

Video contributed by Temporary Distortion to *After the Show*, New York, 2013. Video still courtesy of Temporary Distortion

CAMP AND KROEBER

- MY VOICE HAS AN ECHO IN IT is in development and will premiere in 2014.
-

Blackout.

SCENE SEVEN: DAVID CONISON

Lights shift. A slide reads "David Conison."

DAVID CONISON *enters the stage and positions himself behind the upstage right podium. As he speaks, he advances slides on a laptop to accompany his presentation.*

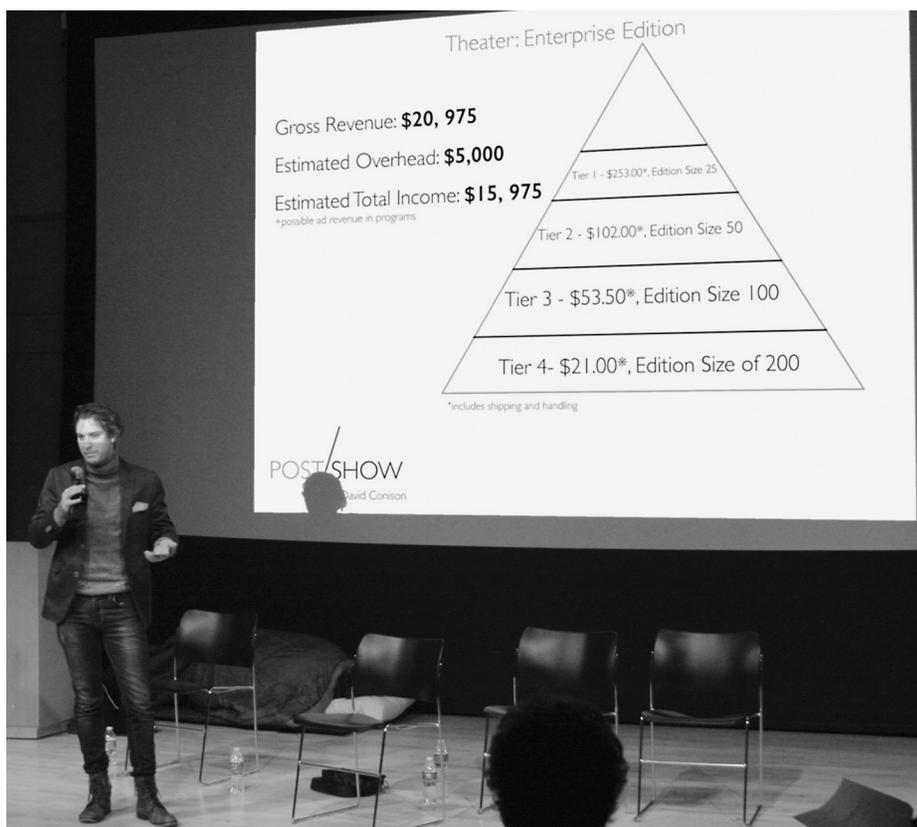
DAVID I'm here to talk about how I hate going to theater and how I intend to fix that. I find that the actual theater part of going to theater

is pretty tiresome and uninteresting, but I actually still go.

I find that the idea of having an event, the dressing up, meeting with my friends, the talking about my opinions (because I'm a huge narcissist) is actually super appealing. So I've created this new business model for how I'm going to go about making theater.

Post/Show is a business-minded way of creating theater. A group of actors and a designer and I will meet, and we'll go through a normal rehearsal process. I'll pay people standard rates, and we will, for all intents and purposes, create a show.

However, rather than inflicting that on the public, we'll just sell talking points and tickets and programs to them instead. At each tier, we're going to give people a different level of service. So someone who pays for a twenty-



David Conison
 in *After the Show*,
 New York, 2013.
 Photo:
 Stephanie Hafer

AFTER THE SHOW

two dollar ticket will get vague points about what they did or did not like about the show, some things about the costumes, whereas a tier one person who's paying a lot of money will receive complex thought pieces they can deploy at will.

Basically, people can choose to use these points however they want. They can meet other people who have hypothetically gone to the show, or they can just have dinner with friends and talk about this amazing or this terrible piece.

The specificity of it, depending on how much you can pay, can be deployed as you want. It really is actual participatory theater in that it doesn't exist without the audience. We are only creating a vessel through which people can create their own experience at will.

I do hope you'll open your checkbooks and give me some money. And we're accepting orders soon.

DAVID *exits the stage. Blackout.*

INTERLUDE: ANONYMOUS CONTRIBUTION

In the blackout, music plays, over which we hear a VOICE.

VOICE Flash mob at a senior center.

Gather as many people as possible in any public commercial space. I'm thinking of an Apple Store now, but it could be anywhere commerce takes place. As a group, chant "We are alienated, isolated, and helpless," until you are kicked out.

Attempt to think an entire Shakespeare play.

Stage Eugene O'Neill plays on oil tankers, container ships, or other vessels travelling in international waters. If you do this, you should also work in the ship's galley.

Lights shift.

SCENE EIGHT: ODYSSEY WORKS

Lights up, bright. A slide reads "Odyssey Works."

QUILL *stands stage right. He looks down at his notes.*

QUILL Odyssey Works creates intimate, multiday experiences for an audience of one, creating a custom odyssey over the course of many months for a single, brave applicant. Interrogating the boundary between performance and reality, the odyssey infiltrates and perhaps radically alters audience participants' daily life to transformative effect.

Please welcome Ayden Grout from Odyssey Works.

AYDEN GROUT *enters and sits center. On the upstage screen, images from Odyssey Works' pieces are projected throughout the following conversation.*

GAVIN (*Sitting next to AYDEN.*) So maybe it's important to open this with a caveat that I can save you from making: Odyssey Works is not theater. Odyssey Works does not think of itself as making theater, but sometimes nonetheless people see theater in your work. So, for example, I know that you receive a lot of applications to be the single audience member, Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* has come up in some of those applications.

AYDEN Almost every single one.

GAVIN You were in the BEAT Festival earlier this fall, which of course is not specifically theater, but it's nonetheless a performing arts festival. So the sort of aim here is to try to reciprocally illuminate both our conceptions about theater and what Odyssey Works is, using one another. So that said, we were just wondering if you could talk about *surrender* and *care* in Odyssey Works' work.

A lot of times theater could be defined as a form of *surrender*—whether this is sort of

CAMP AND KROEBER



Ayden Grout of
Odyssey Works
in *After the Show*,
New York, 2013.
Photo:
Stephanie Hafer

lambasting the passive spectator in traditional theater or actually the much more intensive forms of surrender that happen in something like *Sleep No More*. And so in this regard, there's a kind of rhyme between what you do and theater. If we hazarded a definition of theater that reduces it to this principle of *care*, Odyssey Works is in some ways like an extreme theatricality in a very particular sense. So how do you handle *care*, *surrender*, and the responsibility that comes with it?

AYDEN Well, there are a lot of things. One of the first points I'd like to speak about is the

fact that we call our audience member of one "the participant." So insofar as that language describes our relationship to the audience, they are not surrendering fully. I think that's important to keep in mind.

In our application process, we are inviting the participant to receive a gift that we create, and so we have some complicity, and it's not quite a whole surrender. The participant is trusting us deeply with some of the most intimate information that even their mother, brother, close partner doesn't know.

Our application process is very intensive. And I guess what interests me about this word *surrender* and the idea of *caretaking* is that it's kind of associated with acts of devotion and for us as the makers—I work on a team of about four core creators and then about ten other creative collaborators—and for all of us as soon as we start reading this twenty-five page application, we have to fall in love with our audience member.

I think insofar as our process resembles being in love and the surrender that comes with that, these ideas are important. The idea of treating the participant with tenderness, also knowing that we're not therapy, we are trying to push them and pull them in certain ways. Like I think there was a photo of a man on a stake about to be burned alive . . .

AYDEN *gestures to the rear projection screen.*

That was an incredible act of surrender on his part. And there was trust in that, but also a challenge.

GAVIN Could you elaborate a little bit more about the degree to which to have an odyssey made for you is to have the world remade around you, whether that's in the image you wish or somehow in the image you guys think is appropriate to this sort of subject.

And how do you think about your

responsibility in terms of either reinforcing, skewing, challenging, or ignoring their tastes and values? How do you calibrate the odyssey?

AYDEN (*Indicating the projected images.*) So some of the images you're also seeing are diagrams of experience, and we really think a lot about carefully constructing how a person is willing to receive an experience. For one of our past participants, we knew that he was such a fast-paced, high-brain person that to get him to the place where he was going to be deeply moved and drawn into a moment of beauty, we would have to address and be attentive and take care of that intellectual side of him.

With an odyssey we enter into this elevated sense of reality. It's a portal into the participant's normal existence and their mundane day-to-day. We rely heavily on our allies, which are just the people who are already part of that person's life, but we also integrate actors, and they infiltrate and take on a role in the participant's life during the weeks or months before. Does that answer your question?

GAVIN I think it gets there. In some ways, I want to ask more, but I also kind of want to turn on what you're mentioning. Can you tell us more about how you deploy acting and infiltration, basically robbing from the theatrical tool kit and deploying it in the real?

AYDEN Yes. We work with actors who are formally trained in various methodologies, but one of the things we really try to do is—they get infiltrated through one of these allies and then brought into that person's life, say they go to lunch and they're the old college friend of our participant's best friend.

There's this kind of premise for an actor's presence, but everything else that arises from that interaction and that

relationship is based in the real. An actor will walk away, and the conversation that happens with our creative team afterward ends up being: "How does participant x see you, and what do you think is available in that relationship, what arose naturally in your interactions with that person?"

Maybe the actor seems kind of villainous, and that actor will go on to exacerbate and poke at that relationship that naturally arose, or maybe—Jen, one of our core crew, took on a caretaking role this year. We keep coming back to this theme of caretaking, and she had this motherly, protective thing for our participant, and that's just what arose out of her nature.

So in that way there's no mimetic feeling to the way our participant interacts with people.

I also want to say something about the way that theater works in this idea of creating a premise—theater almost comes more closely to what I do after the fact on the documentation side of things.

We really narrativize *after*, because thirty-six hours of experience—or even more extreme, this year we made a performance that was two months long—that's just too much for anyone outside of the work to experience and really understand until the piece gets reduced into these bits of residue and the things that are documented and left behind afterward. In that way, it's easier to gather the pieces and create the script of it all afterward.

GAVIN I wanted to ask in this conversation about care. Obviously anyone who is willing to do an odyssey enters into this with a great deal of trust. Are there ways that that constrains you? Are there types of meaning that you're unable to make or types of things you cannot do because you've been entrusted?

CAMP AND KROEBER

AYDEN Yes. When we interview the friends and family of our participant, we always ask about the no-go zones. And I think that that's a really hard question.

The things that we're not allowed to do come very much from our participant and how much he or she decides to fully participate. Some people come in with this very—willing suspension of disbelief is the thing we have in common with theater in that our participant is a *participant*, but they are also obedient in many ways.

It varies piece to piece whether or not the participant will decide to latch on and push the boundaries of what we create. They might be paranoid and assume everyone in their life is conspiring against them, or they might decide to be “pronoiac” and assume everyone's conspiring to do good things for them, that everyone's infiltrating not to give them a mind fuck but to give them a gift.

GAVIN Great.

GAVIN *looks to the* TIMEKEEPER, *who gives*
GAVIN *a signal.*

And with that I just got the one minute.

(*To* AYDEN.) Thank you.

(*To audience.*) Ayden Grout of Odyssey Works.

Applause. Blackout.

SCENE NINE: ALEC DUFFY

In darkness, a slide appears, which reads: “Alec Duffy.”

The slide disappears and a video plays. In the video, we see ALEC DUFFY speaking to the camera as he exits a building and begins to walk down a Brooklyn street.

ALEC So there's a German theater director whose name is Johannes von Milke, and I'm kind of fascinated by what he's doing, and—I should tell you right now that everything I'm about to say is fiction.

But what he's doing is: he's kind of got this big beef with narrative, you know, it's a common beef, having been inspired by Guy Debord and *The Society of the Spectacle* . . . blah blah blah.

The problem with narrative, marketing, stories, that they're all part of a reductiveness that's very dangerous in our society—in our world—because the moment you start telling a story, you are by necessity, because of time constraints, simplifying the story and not including all the important information . . .

(*Looking at oncoming traffic.*) . . . oh god . . .

(*Back to the camera.*) So he said, well, in the rehearsal room that's when I feel like we're actually trying to, in the rehearsal room is where we get our little fantasy land where we try to break up narrative, right? And we do that for four hours, five hours, but then all of us go back out into the streets and have interactions with so-called civilians and whatnot, and you just have to employ these simplified narratives in your everyday interactions with people.

So he started developing this method where you actually . . .

(Looking both ways and continuing to walk.) . . . oh boy . . .

(Back to the camera.) . . . treat your entire life as a rehearsal. So he tries to expand the borders of the rehearsal room to twenty-four hours a day.

It starts to rain.

And of course you can't do that when other people aren't part of the bargain, so-called civilians, and so he basically decided he had to form his own community . . .

ALEC kneels and withdraws an umbrella from his backpack. He opens it and continues to walk during the following.

. . . with all the people agreeing to be a part of this and agreeing to certain rules . . . so, so he did, in fact.

He moved a group of his actors and whatnot to this island off the northern coast of Africa, and that's where they formed this community where their entire life is in rehearsal trying to break down this structure of narrative in story.

And what it looks like, the actual technique that they use is, they basically practice—they are in rehearsal all the time, practicing how to talk with one another in a way that avoids any simplification. So that actually involves saying—how that manifests is, basically saying what's on your mind all the time.

So I would say, "I'll meet you there at two o'clock p.m. tomorrow but I understand since you're going to be late, you're normally late and that pisses me off a lot, can we please say 1:45 p.m. and that way you'll show up at two."

And then the other person will say that you're a dick, like anyway you just have this constant . . . everyone just pours out everything that's on their mind, and it's this



complicated tangle, just really recognizing the complexity of life and the different perspectives instead of trying to avoid them or eschew them.

So that's I guess that's a theater world I'm very curious about and would like to see how that works. And in fact a few of us are going to make a trip down to that island next spring to experience that. It's a grant through the Franklin Furnace. We've gotten a grant to do that, to go there and research and maybe come back and present some of the work we witnessed here in New York City.

Blackout.

Alec Duffy in *After the Show*, New York, 2013. Video still courtesy of Alec Duffy

CAMP AND KROEBER

SCENE TEN: KATIE PEARL

In darkness, a slide appears, which reads: "Katie Pearl."

The slide disappears and a video plays. The video is an animated presentation. We hear KATIE PEARL's voice over the presentation.

KATIE Hi, I'm Katie Pearl.

How can theater be more like a conversation?

How about a model in which the play you write is only one note in a constellation of events crafted by you?

What conversation do you want to have?

A play can be *part* of the conversation, but it cannot *be* the conversation. As a writer, the constellation as a whole is your project. The constellation as a whole is your project.

A slide reads: "Case Study: ARNIE, LOUIS, and BOB."

Okay, here's a case study for a project called *Arnie, Louis, and Bob*. It's a constellation instigated by a play I wanted to write about my two bachelor uncles Arnie and Louis and their best friend Bob. I'm going to show you the nodes that belong to this constellation.

Your nodes, your events for your project will be up to you based on how you want to shape the conversation you want to have. Your constellation could take place over a year, a month, a week, a weekend, a day—it's totally up to you.

I imagine *Arnie, Louis, and Bob* playing out over about ten days, one day for each node. Audiences might access all or only some of these events.

The nodes can happen in any order, but it always starts with the invitation. The invitation welcomes you and orients you to the conversation, which will inform and, of

course, have many layers. My invitation is a hand-held series of maps that brings you closer and closer to the geographic center of the conversation, my uncles and the house they live in, which happens to be their childhood home now reclaimed after the death of my grandmother.

The first node will be private video tours of the house and the things in it given by Arnie, Louis, Bob, and me, four separate tours each from our own perspective. You can watch any or all of them. You'll access this in your own home from your own computer. Questions should start to bubble up here about authorship and ownership. Who is in control, me or the real men I'm using to create this story?

I'm just going to name the nodes now and you can read the descriptions.

This node is called Exhibit of Objects.

A slide reads: "EXHIBIT OF OBJECTS: The audience comes to the theater for the first time where they see a gallery exhibit of objects that were in the video."

This node is the actual play.

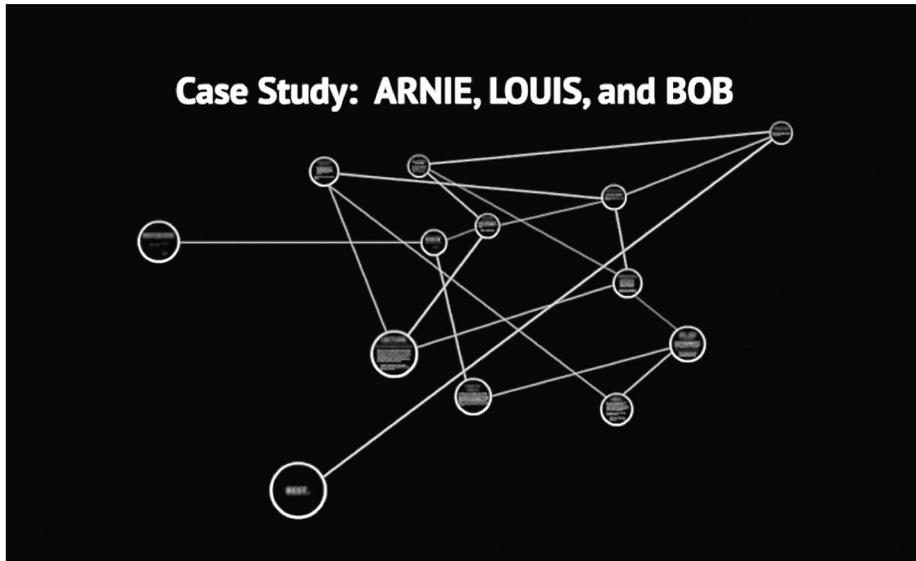
A slide reads: "PLAY: A performance of the full-length play Arnie, Louis, and Bob, written by me. A fantasy version of these 3 elderly men doing their best to have individually satisfying lives as they are roommates in their childhood home."

A Meal.

A slide reads: "MEAL: Here we are served favorite foods of the 3 men, including fried matzoh, kishka, vegetarian chili, milk, and vitamins."

Animated Shorts.

A slide reads: "AUTO-BIOGRAPHICAL ANIMATIONS: Animated shorts of Arnie, Louis, and Bob talking about their own lives."



Katie Pearl's slide presentation in *After the Show*, New York, 2013. Image courtesy of Katie Pearl

This node is a book discussion about the novel *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie.

A slide reads: "BOOK DISCUSSION: A book discussion about J. M. Barrie's PETER PAN."

A call-in and/or Skype-in where the audience can talk to the real Arnie, Louis, and Bob.

A slide reads: "CALL-IN: The three men are available via Skype or phone for questions."

A lecture of child-rearing tactics of the 1940s and '50s.

A slide reads: "LECTURE: A lecture on child-rearing tactics of the 1940s and '50s."

This node is a poetry reading of Louis reading his own poetry.

A slide reads: "POETRY READING: Here Louis will give a reading of his haiku and other poems."

This node is called the Response.

A slide reads: "RESPONSE, the final event: A circle discussion comprised of every audience member who wants to come."

Thank-you cards sent to everyone who participated.

A slide reads: "THANK YOU: Thank you cards are sent by Katie to everyone who participated in this experience, including Arnie, Louis, and Bob."

The final node is always Rest.

A slide reads: "REST."

That's the end of my proposal.

Please let me know what you think. You can write me at katie@pearldamour.com.

Blackout.

INTERLUDE: ANONYMOUS CONTRIBUTION

In the blackout, music plays, over which we hear a VOICE.

VOICE Working in a group of two or more, write the script for a normal day. Then spend the day following the script in exact detail.

Sell drugs and use the proceeds to finance a community garden, daycare center, or other social need in your area.

Write a series of plays that can only be performed in the future.

Explain your emotional state to a gallery attendant.

CAMP AND KROEBER

SCENE ELEVEN: YELENA GLUZMAN

Lights shift. GAVIN and QUILL move center.

A slide reads "Yelena Gluzman."

GAVIN All right, to close out the first half of the evening, we'd like to introduce Yelena Gluzman. She is a theater artist who makes site-specific works with an expanded definition of site. To give you a sense of her work, I can quickly describe her show *This Town*. *This Town* was one of a series of shows in which Yelena looked at formal elements of performance. For each show in this series, she would strategically remove one critical element of a performance while trying to retain a performance structure. In *This Town* she eliminated the unspoken agreement between the performers and audience. So, before *This Town* is performed, actors are invited to audition for a play. Meanwhile, a play is advertised for a paying audience.

The auditioners and audience show up to the same place. Yelena sits in between the audience and performers.

In Act 1, Yelena auditions each of the four performers.

In Act 2, the audience is called, one by one, to pay their admission fee directly to one of the four auditioners.

In Act 3, the auditioners are asked to repeat their audition from memory, all four simultaneously. Though the audience and performers do the jobs assigned to them by a traditional theatrical framework, there is a fundamental disagreement about what is happening in the room.

Yelena also curates the performance series for Ugly Duckling Presse, of which she is also a founder. Her publications include *Emergency Index*, an annual compendium of performance documents, and *Emergency Playscripts*, a series of texts highlighting issues of notation. Please welcome Yelena Gluzman.

GAVIN *moves offstage right. YELENA enters and stands at the upstage left podium.*

YELENA (*Pointing to a projected slide that reads: "The research process is a community-building process; research must be conceived as processual without knowing necessarily the goals of a project."*) Anthropologist and activist Kim TallBear said this during her talk at the 4S conference this year. The kind of research she was championing is a radical departure for the academy.

Her research, which is formally structured as *within a community* (as opposed to research from an objective outside), which is necessarily conceived as *entangled with voices and points of view*, and whose structure and goals are *contingent upon this entanglement*. Well, this is theater (I thought), it is a process and crisis, and (as someone who started in neuroscience and drifted to theater) this is the logic of my switch from the lab to the rehearsal room, from an empirical and controlled study of mechanisms to the empires built in small groups, in shabby rooms, built and destroyed in plain view.

Not that the hierarchies and partial vision of the lab are avoided in the rehearsal; on the contrary, theater and performance have some of the most entrenched hierarchies in social groups, both among humans but also in terms of architectures, temporality, and sense making. *This room is asking you to look at me.*

When people would ask me to make sense of going from brain science to theater, I'd usually say that "theater seemed a really flexible way to ask similar questions." Though you may wonder what those questions could be, today I'm more interested in thinking about what I could have meant by the word "flexible."

Flexible, I realized as I listened to Kim TallBear's talk, was not just a matter of research protocol but actually a matter

AFTER THE SHOW

of mess. Theater is messy; the hierarchies that characterize it are fragile and always already coming apart in the very ontological structure of a performance event. The tyranny of the director is there but can be undone in the threat of the visibility and unmasking of the directorial process; the director is acknowledged, accountable, and never totally in control of the subjectivities, bodies, materials, contingencies that pervade and constitute the theatrical event.

anthropology, to refuse the analysis “from above” and, rather, enter the mess. Her work is an attempt to make the very definition of what the research can and should do contingent upon the people who choose to participate. If this isn’t experimental theater, I’m not sure what is.

Gavin and Quill organized this event around the question of why experimental theater makers are still making theater, as they wrote, “shows” in “black boxes.” I have



Gavin Kroeber, Emily Althaus, and Morgan Spector during Yelena Guzman’s contribution to *After the Show*, New York, 2013. Photo: Stephanie Hafer

I target the director here, but the same is true of ensembles, performers, stage managers, playwrights, as opposed to the lab, where all that is external to the empirical project must be repressed and excluded. The rehearsal room and performance space offer the flexibility, the impossibility of control, the mess, to suffer hierarchy as a material from which to think and through which to build.

By structuring her research in such a way that confounds the audience, subjects, and author of the research, Kim TallBear is using performance strategies to radicalize

no answer here except to say that delineating who is included in the set of “experimental theater makers” is already half the analysis.

The slide changes, showing a new quote.

From my vantage point, I see that theater strategies have been taken up by science, by anthropology, by activism, by poetry. When I hear about experimental theater, I ask: what’s the experiment? And the black box makes more sense to me as it was described by sociologist Bruno Latour: “The word black box is used by cyberneticians whenever a piece

CAMP AND KROEBER

of machinery is too complex. In its place they draw a little box about which they need to know nothing but its input and its output.” To “open” a black box, for Latour, is to reimmerse oneself in the chaotic contingencies which had stabilized into a usable concept, process, thing; to open a black box is to put yourself in the middle of a fucking mess.

YELENA steps out and looks directly at the audience.

So, since you’ve been a very good audience thus far, and played your part well, I propose that we take the next few minutes to make a show.

Not one show, actually, but many shows, as many as there are of us.

I am no longer speaking metaphorically and from the periphery. I actually mean that each of you will become a director and each one of us directors will proceed to make a show that he or she can live with, or look at, or think through, or desire.

Each of us will direct, and each one of us directors will make a show. All the plays will happen at roughly the same time, that is, now.

You can use anything you want to make your play—other people, objects, whatever texts you have at hand—and you can rehearse and then perform, or implement a structure and just watch it play out. Yes, we will all direct at the same time. You really only have about five minutes total, which is a standard New York rehearsal time by the way.

I hope you are having ideas, because now you should be standing up, looking around, gathering your resources, talking to each other.

Audience members begin to get up and follow YELENA’s instructions.

Of course, it is likely that another director will ask you to do something while you yourself are directing, and it is entirely at your discretion whether or not you can comply, and what it might mean to be a director and actor and audience, and I see that you are already beginning, standing up, seeing some possibilities, and talking to each other, and making choices, and I see some plays have already begun and soon you will no longer be able to hear my voice because I will just be one director among many.

The noise of the audience directing one another fills the stage and the house as many small, strange performances are attempted.

INTERMISSION

ACT II: IMPLICATIONS

SCENE ONE: KARINNE KEITHLEY SYERS

Lights up. A slide reads, “Karinne Keithley Syers.”

QUILL stands center, looking at notes.

QUILL Welcome back. Our next presenter is Karinne Keithley Syers. Karinne is a theater maker, artist, and scholar. Her recent performance piece, *Another Tree Dance*, which was at the Chocolate Factory Theater in Long Island City earlier this fall, is hard to encapsulate, but perhaps it will suffice to note the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson provided some of its central material. Karinne is also the founder and coeditor of 53rd State Press, an independent publisher of plays and performance texts. Please welcome Karinne.

Lights shift. A soft glow center. KARINNE KEITHLEY SYERS sits and reads aloud from a typed manuscript.

KARINNE I was asked to contribute to this event just as I was in the middle of making a show. At various speculative stages of that process, I had imagined the show to run along very open lines, like my very own Museum of Jurassic Technology built into the event space, punctuated by occasional and discrete performance acts: songs, dances. But as I persisted in the process, I decided to embrace all the techniques that theater offered, unabashed, in front of the young people.

I tried to articulate the difference between a *show* and the other forms this conference lists as potential places into which theatrical thinking moves: events, parades, meals, businesses, vacations. I think what is at stake in segregating these manifestations, is the presumed role of the audience in relationship to the object of theatrical thinking. This includes the work done by the audience, as well as the demands I can make of the audience of my show: to submit to my controlling navigation of a speculative object, for a discrete period of time.

I know we are in the age of participation. And I love to touch you and take your photograph. But I cannot see that we should abandon theater in favor of a presumed stock of collective meaningfulness or contemporary relevance that more overtly participatory forms have. I do not mean that we should not make events, parades, meals, vacations, businesses, or museums. But when it comes time to make the show, make the show. Shows are healthier when they are rare. They require so much investment, and they perish so quickly. At least mine do, at an average rate of four nights every three years. Each show marks the calendar, as a kind of high holiday, a ritual of both humiliation and success.

There is a book called *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* that Mac Wellman



had me read. In it, the author traces the long history of the denigration of theatricality. In it, Jonas Barish traces the long history of theater's attempt to renew theater.

Why should we not also have an original relation to the universe, said Ralph Waldo Emerson.

If I defend theater, then, if I speak on behalf of theater, speak as a lover and a partisan, you should know that I am not talking about what we know about theater but about the theater toward which we gesture, at the outset of any speculation that becomes a piece. I imagine it as a chamber where a form hovers in a real, plain room. Or

Karinne Keithley Syers in *After the Show*, New York, 2013. Photo: Stephanie Hafer

CAMP AND KROEBER

in a real, embellished room. Hovers by the grace of our collective attention, which is an underestimated form of participation.

Stanley Cavell, a philosopher who has written much about Emerson, has also written about opera and about the act of raising the voice as gesturing toward an intervening realm, a realm of significance which always remains prospective, but to which, in the gesture of singing, we feel ourselves pressed, existing in both places, in the world and in the significance of the world, like a harmonic overtone.

I persist in thinking that theater is a name we give to one of the venues in which we hope to have that experience. I persist in believing that the changes we make in our techniques and our consensus about what is and what is not moving and real and significant, is not directional, is certainly not representative of a progress, but just a condition of staying in motion, a condition necessary to any living thing, be it organism or group endeavor.

There is a form wagered. The form itself, though we might find ways to map or describe it, is immaterial. It is a reference point between ranges of matter. It feeds back into us. It hovers there like a spinning plate, for as long as we will concentrate on it. What happens may not survive the experience.

An audience is needed. An audience has a job, to be the second of three terms in the support of the spinning. Maybe an audience that is eating or walking or patronizing a business *can* do this job. I have seen such things happen. But if the question posed is about the migration of theatrical thinking into venues that do not look like black boxes, I make the case for privileging the role and work of the audience in our migratory considerations, make the case for considering this shared work to be

the principal good of our trade. I remain convinced that the work of the audience takes place best in a condition of intense receptivity, which is why we generally expect audiences to stay quiet, convinced that that receptive work is structured and validated by the neutrality, before we assemble, of the possible combination of people in that gathering, always unknown until the particular night and always potentially different. I remain convinced that quiet is necessary because an audience joins in a group tone, a room tone, while simultaneously adding energy to that room tone through the experience of solitude within a crowd that underwrites the energy of the group.

Jonathan Edwards described the furnished room of elemental relations as “the room of the idea,” a conceptual chamber of meditation upon a word or an image, a chamber in which an idea is staged, an image space which to persist until it strikes the physical, nervous, hormonal, conceptual, and for him religious “sense of the heart,” which is full-bodied understanding. Theater as room recreates these conditions, in company. It speaks to the plural. In chambers, *in camera*, light and sound and image and the feeling of near bodies strike sensitive matter. It thrives on your willingness to persist in the dimness, so as not to ruin the exposure. The print that comes of it is not part of the room. The print is transmissible, equipped to survive in time, whereas what happens in the room always lasts for a while and then recedes. We gather, close the door, and occupy the room together. Something shows itself, we hope.

Wallace Stevens writes that the task of the poet is to make the invisible visible. It is one of the refrains of the seminar I took here at the Grad Center with Joan Richardson for several years in a row, an experience that I found a close cousin to attending the theater.

In the theatrical room of showing, how do we make the invisible visible? I like to experiment with the gathering itself as the medium of that rendering. Dancers tend to know about this emerging visibility of the invisible and train to become attentive instruments registering the tiny sensory feedback of spectral images. Our bodies experience these shifting, living moods as new regions. Many dance techniques develop approaches to finding new moods, through image work. In Ohan Naharin's Gaga technique, a rare bird that combines astonishing prowess, articulate expressiveness, and expansive strangeness, one practices interior decoration, visualizing ornate embellishment of one's body's interior, producing a baroque and sensuously delightful private shine that transforms the dancing body, elevates and tilts it as it makes its way through more traditionally describable movement sequences. You couldn't necessarily identify, say, that the dancer is experiencing feedback from an overlaid image of his internal organs slowly revolving in a fluid suspension permeated with specks of gold leaf, but you do identify an opening and softening and radiating of that body, note its proprioception apparently extending well beyond large descriptions ("my arm is behind me"), toward a depth map of responsive fascia articulating joints, of waves of electrical energy coursing through the nervous system. This is not a dancer's hallucination; it is an increase of range and capacity to act. To get a chance to experience this opulence is one of the better reasons to be a dancer. Deborah Hay practices something similar, working with annual meditations, to which she invites her body to make a cellular response. After reading about Hay's work, I adapted the meditation to something that could be played in the relational space of gathering, the feedback loop between my body and the

audience's bodies as I am seen and return the gaze. I see you experiencing my care. I see you see me as a tree. I see you see me see you as an abominable branch. To do this, I impose the image on the circuit of the returned gaze, register my own body shifting in the embrace of that image, and trust the body of the audience to respond affectively; the image hovers and transits, signal of "the more than rational distortion" that takes place in a "radiant and productive atmosphere" (more Stevens, more of Joan's refrains).

Instead of abandoning the show, let us think more about what shows itself, and how to make it *more than rational*. Let's think about the wager of inviting being seen *as* something while plainly not being that thing, about the value of a collective etude in seeing something as also something else. Projecting a third term, an intervening realm of speculation, fiction is a float across scaffolds of possibility, and in the theater we are asked to register that floating speculation as a beholding of a possible world, register it in our bodies, which we can do because we are near it. So theater is a venue for the experience of multiplicity, of a prospective commons. Making the show, we address ourselves to a neutral, unknown combination of people. As an audience, we locate within or just beyond ourselves, that neutral, unknown possibility, and agree to be addressed there. What will you allow it to address in you? I prefer not to be addressed as a consumer, but as a member of the wedding.

Let us abandon "contemporary performance."

Let us abandon the god damned art world.

Let us abandon critique but not severity.

Let us abandon our seating arrangements for seating arrangements that

CAMP AND KROEBER

let me see you better.

Performance does not matter, except to those who do it and see it.

Performance is for us, but we cannot know where that *us* begins and ends, or what *us* will look like in the future.

What will show itself? How can we keep trying to see it?

We do not know what the old things looked like.

We cannot compass what the old things thought.

We cannot assume we are smarter or better.

We cannot assume we are not.

Paint the black boxes white, the better to see each other.

That is enough progress.

Instead of moving forward, let us remember we don't know what we are doing, and let us be cheered by this thought, into more of this divine puttering, taken up in whatever kind of room we can afford to gather in.

Blackout.

SCENE TWO: SHANNON JACKSON

In darkness, a slide appears that reads "Shannon Jackson."

GAVIN *moves upstage left.*

GAVIN Shannon Jackson is the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Professor of Rhetoric and of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies in the Arts and Humanities at the University of California at Berkeley, where she is also director of the Arts Research Center. Among her books are *Professing Performance* and *Social Works*, both profoundly influential works within the field of performance studies and the history of performance. Last week, in the ramp-up to this evening, we were able to hop

on Skype with Shannon, and we wanted to share a few cuts and slices of what we were able to talk about.

A video plays, which seems to be an edited recording of an earlier Skype conversation. In the video frame we see the faces of GAVIN, QUILL, and SHANNON JACKSON.

The video goes to black, and a legend reads: "Does theater take care of its audience?"

The Skype video fades up again.

SHANNON You know, what some would call a caretaking impulse in the theater is to others a constraining impulse in the theater. That discourse of theater as a constraining space has been a huge part of a lot of the twentieth-century experimental theater practice—not only twentieth-century experimental visual art history—where artists seem to be trying to free theater from the theater apparatus.

And it's at those moments that usually theater experimenters might even use, as say somebody like Richard Schechner did, an antitheater discourse in order to propel themselves. We want to change the format and the process, and we want to activate the audience differently, and we don't want to constrain them with our caretaking.

And maybe at this moment in 2013, the liberatory possibilities of freeing the audience from those constraints perhaps don't look as liberatory as they might have in the '60s or '70s, when a certain constellation of experimentation really took hold.

Now we can find that kind of high octane experimental activation at a high-tech corporate conference, or inside the latest marketing campaign from some hotel chain—all around us, products and companies are *activating* and *freeing* you, enabling your participation, and it doesn't necessarily feel all that liberatory.

So it may be that there are really historically specific reasons to be taking another look, to consider now that what has been called the constraining apparatus of theater spectatorship has also always been about caretaking.

In that case I think that we need to change the marketing, or change how we present ourselves, and I think it would take a little bit of work to change the language around theater, to claim that apparatus as part of what's on offer, not as the thing that we're all supposed to be trying to escape.

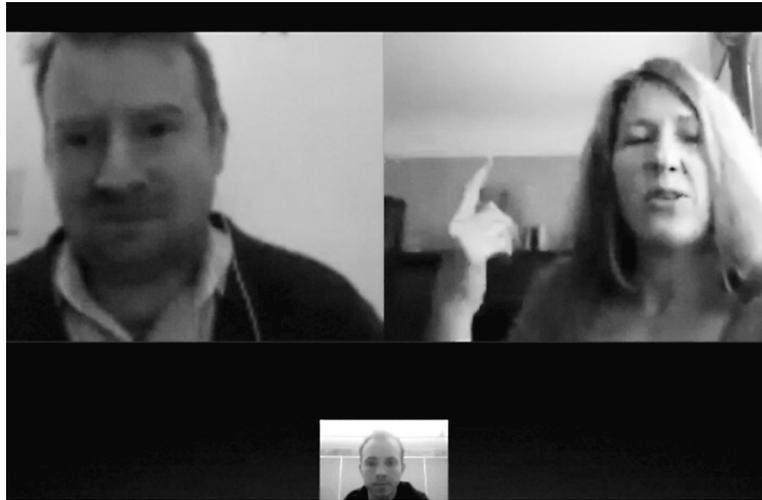
The video fades out. Text appears: "Do you think we are getting out of a long tradition of anti-theatrical discourse?"

The Skype video reappears.

SHANNON It seems to me that throughout the history of different art movements, as well as different, you could say, analytic movements in the last few years, there are always these moments where the stuff of theater often seems like the stuff that people *want*, and then as soon as it becomes theater-like or gets called theater, they reject it.

So I'll just mention some examples of this wild paradoxical history that I feel like we are always enduring: within literary studies drama historically wasn't considered a proper or legitimate literary form, because it couldn't detach itself from context and reception enough to stand on its own. And then, literary theorists and literary historians started to become really interested in the power of text to engage its context and didn't quite notice that theater had been doing that for a long time.

Or in the visual arts world, there are so many different curators and artists who say that they don't believe Michael Fried, that they want to get away from that kind of modernist antitheatrical discourse, that their work is only intelligible as something that is



a counter to Fried, and at the same time, as soon as it is *too* theater-like—they wouldn't want it to actually be theater, even if they embrace theatricality.

So just in reflecting about all of this, there is this paradoxical sense of an embrace that then gets qualified in some way. It's not-unconditional love.

In the video, GAVIN and QUILL laugh.

Part of me just wants to tell so many artists, curators, and scholars just to let yourself love it. We have so many different ways of protecting ourselves from our desire to be in a theater. And there's part of me that just wants to say, "Give in, people!" That's the high school drama teacher: "Give in, people!"

The video fades out. Text appears: "Could the theatre gain something critically from the interest of the visual arts in performance?"

The Skype video reappears.

SHANNON Visual art institutions are often more committed to something like public discourse and public deliberation, with writing and critical reflection as a wing of what they're doing. You could argue about how rigorous it is, but it is more often a

Shannon Jackson in *After the Show*, New York, 2013. Video still courtesy of Gavin Kroeber

CAMP AND KROEBER

part of the institution to have, not just a talkback at the show, but a symposium that's associated with the exhibition, and a catalogue associated with the exhibition, and a bookstore attached to the museum that sells reflection.

So you could say that precisely this is a potential partnership with a reflective arts field, an arts field in which a certain kind of reflection, even in the United States, is woven into the job. You know, again, I don't mean to celebrate and say how much better arts institutions are than theater institutions, but there's something about critical reflection that is more woven into the job description.

So I'd say that definitely there's something critical to be gained by a visual arts interest in the theater. But then there are whole reams of theater people who couldn't care less and have no idea about this visual arts interest. And when they do see it, they find it baffling, and sometimes they feel that the work is just actually bad. That the work that's produced and curated in visual arts institutions is very uninteresting, not skilled, and they don't really get it. This is not to say that leaders at theatrical institutions are not doing a great deal of reflection, but we won't get as much out of the visual arts if theatrical artists aren't interested in that interest.

The video fades out. Text appears: "Do you think theater tends toward an essentially affirmative discourse, or can it engage more critically?"

The Skype video reappears.

SHANNON I guess I worry that the apparatus around theater includes a sort of marketing that is generally affirmative. Some museums and biennials do as well. But I do wonder whether the marketing could actually embrace criticality, rather than present the event as a thing that you will inevitably be compelled to like. Is there another frame that

can draw people in? One that puts forward the idea that this event is going to be about deliberation and about something more than affirmation?

Blackout.

SCENE THREE: DAVID LEVINE

Lights up, bright. A slide reads "David Levine."

QUILL *moves to center.*

QUILL (*Reading from notes.*) David Levine is a genre-bending theater maker and artist. In 2012 he created *Habit*, in which audiences peered through windows in a Lower East Side space to witness actors repeating the same ninety-minute script for eight hours at a stretch. His *Actors at Work* in 2006 similarly interrogated notions of theater and labor by creating a theater piece of actors merely carrying out their day jobs, but complete with Actors' Equity paperwork.

His 2007 piece *Bauerntheater* [Farmers' Theater] took the question of labor even further. A combination of method acting, land art, and durational performance, the piece consisted of a single actor hand plowing a potato field in rural eastern Germany in character. Please welcome David Levine.

DAVID LEVINE *enters and sits center with GAVIN and QUILL.*

GAVIN Hi David. So in some ways we wanted to close with a conversation with you because you've been talking about these issues for a long time, and it seemed appropriate to almost position you as a kind of respondent, but also to take a little bit of time to discuss your work, which to a great degree seems to steal from theater, or treats it as a kind of scrap heap that you can pull pieces from and leave the rest behind, and go and deploy

AFTER THE SHOW

whatever element you've unearthed in some other domain. So that might be headshots becoming part of a gallery exhibition, or method acting becoming an act of labor in a field. Do you consider these works to be theater?

DAVID I think it's a kind of an off question. It's theater if it's presented within a theatrical context, and it's art if it's presented within an art context. And I often try to make objects that would sit exactly in the middle, so that depending which frame they land in, they seem to be radically different objects. So yes, it's theater if it's produced by a theater.

GAVIN So when you begin a project like this, what frameworks do you bring to it, or is it something that's almost a sociology of the arts in that way—you're thinking of these objects that you're trying to articulate a bridge between?

DAVID No, it just kind of happens. It depends on the project, with things like *Bauerntheater*, or with *Habit*, I was very deliberately trying to think about how we watch, and a couple of other people have also talked about this, how we tend to hide the traces of work that go into a spectacle and sort of being much more interested in process.

So *Habit* was really about—and sort of related to what Yelena was doing, although I didn't know about that piece—I wanted to see what would happen if you took away everything around theater that makes it theater, but just left the content, would you still have theater? Because you see these things that are billed as experimental, and the experiment, no matter how many video screens you have or no matter how many people are in costumes dancing in front of buildings, or no matter how much *anything* you have, somehow it always feels like theater.

So then the question was, if experimentation was always constrained by the fact that you do buy a ticket and you do show up and you do pay a certain kind of attention, if I removed every single ritual around the piece except for the totally conventional play at the center of it, and if I just increased the frequency of the loop from once a night—which is how it works normally, it's set up to be a low-frequency loop so you can feel like it's the first time every time, and you can feel like it's just for



you, with traces of labor completely effaced, but if you ask anyone who's been in a show three, four months, it's like . . . *aaargh*—so I just figured I'd do the whole three-, four-month run in ten days.

There's no start time, there's no ticketing, there's no auditorium, it's just gallery benches, and they're just doing it on a loop—all the things that condition total *inattention* when you're in a museum, in other words. I realized this when watching Matthew Barney, watching all of *Cremaster* in a movie theater, and having paid for a ticket, and having been in this architecture that compels your attention in this way. And

David Levine
in *After the Show*,
New York, 2013.
Photo:
Stephanie Hafer

CAMP AND KROEBER

I got a lot out of it. I like *Cremaster* a lot in a gallery, but in a gallery I don't pay attention.

So I wanted to see what would happen to theater if you removed everything that made it theater and gave it everything that visual art spectatorship is engaged in, and what kind of object you would have then. So sometimes it's really deliberate.

But also, back to I forget who said this, that elements of theater are in call centers, and flight attendants who stay on script, it is everywhere but the theater, and the different ways that those little fragments of it . . . I was never a good theater maker. I never believed, I don't like going, I'm not easily moved, I don't feel like I have any sense of community whatsoever, I don't like being in a room with people, I fall asleep after five minutes, so everything that kind of goes into *making* theater wound up being more compelling to me—or I guess I didn't take that stuff for granted because I didn't like the result anyway—so like, headshots really creeped me out. They creep everyone out, but they creeped me out enough to want to make more work about headshots.

And I didn't want to make a play about these things, because then you're just recapitulating . . . I could have done a play about every single element of theater I've done work on, but that would just recapitulate the situation in the first place.

So you kind of had to . . . if I want to think about what method acting is, or the idea of method acting, even though method acting doesn't really exist, the whole American myth of it—I couldn't do it in a theater. You'd have to have these projects that would test it in another way.

QUILL A couple minutes ago you said that this work that bills itself as experimental is in some ways fundamentally not experimental because it doesn't engage with its context,

and I guess what that makes me wonder, is “experimental” a value for you, like experimenting when you make your work?

DAVID It's a value . . . I'm like an old school modernist, kind of. It's a value for me to the extent that I feel like you should keep pushing the form, that it is really important to make people watch in a different way. Like if you went to see this Heiner Müller character, you went to the farm, all you did was see a dude farming. You basically saw durational performance, and you're like, “What the fuck?”

But if you went to the field to see a good durational performance, you actually saw an actor doing it instead of me, and he was *also* dressed up like a theater character. . . . And I think it's really important to make promises and then short-circuit them. And I think my issue with theater generally is that, institutionally, there are very few means to inquire about the form.

So the meaning tends to be: “I'm going to do something really radical *on stage*.” But that doesn't strike me as experimental because the frame is still an apparatus for viewing that was invented in the nineteenth century, and it doesn't matter if it's in the round or wherever. You're carrying a proscenium in your head, as soon as you make the agreement to go to a theater.

So that leaves you—and this is the Fried thing again—painters, before Minimalism, in agony over how many different ways you can shape a canvas. There was still this conceptual limit to how far they could go. So it's sort of like, you can do whatever you like in a theater, but so long as you haven't questioned the idea of, “All right, I'm gonna buy a ticket, I'm gonna show up on time, and the lights are gonna go down or they're not gonna go down, but that's only in relation to the fact that they *could've* gone

down,” . . . as long as none of that apparatus is being asked about, it seems like seventy or eighty percent of the theatrical experience is the same every time. And if you are amenable to that, if you’re open to that agreement, like Karinne is, that’s awesome. I never was, so I’m like, “Ahh! It’s not experimental.” And it does matter to me.

GAVIN Maybe shifting away from your work a touch, one thing that’s come up a lot in the discussions leading up to this and the discussions today and the contributions tonight, is that very quickly after a prompt like this that puts these sort of altered forms of theater on the table, we start talking about escape vectors.

And the two escape vectors that seem to come up are: *one*, to just merge entirely with the experience economy, and *two*, to enter into the visual arts. And there’s been a lot of conversation today about comparing those two worlds, which you obviously straddle. The experience economy is much more easily denigrated and walked away from in these conversations, whereas the visual arts sort of sit there as this ambivalent other thing. My question actually isn’t necessarily about the visual arts per se, but is there another viable model that should be in this conversation?

DAVID Yes. I make stuff *about* performance that shows up in a visual arts context, I don’t do a lot of visual arts performance, the kind of live performance stuff, because I don’t like events.

I don’t like events, period.

I don’t like theatrical events, and I don’t like events in an art context.

I like boring, dumb stuff that you can step away from. I think the viable models are definitely sports, TV production, movies, circuses . . . I think this choice between

experience economies or the visual arts is a really narrow way of looking at it, and again, I think it’s sort of spectacle based, but sports are amazing, and it’s a completely different kind of spectatorship.

It’s like *Red* with the guy painting, or there was a play at the Atlantic years ago that had a basketball court on it, like a shortened one, and it was like, “Oh, they’re playing basketball in the play,” not super convincing—but basketball itself. But it’s because they’re still fundamentally committed to *keeping it theater*.

If you’ve ever seen a football game played in an empty stadium, it looks just like a sound stage. Arenas are basically TV studios. And when they’re empty they reveal their character as TV studios. So I think it’s actually pretty narrow and impoverished thinking. I think there’s this idea that if you move to visual arts you can still *hold onto* theater, but if you were to do sports as sports (rather than sports as theater), then that just wouldn’t be *theater* anymore.

But it’s the same in visual arts, you know. If you leave for the movies you are making movies. *Twelve Years a Slave* doesn’t get to be video art as well. So I think it’s, again, coming back to this, I don’t think anyone really wants to leave theater as an idea, even though everyone’s like totally dissatisfied with it. But you *could*. We *could*. But we don’t. So I think the question is more what is it we cleave to than how do we get out.

QUILL Do you feel like there’s something that you cleave to?

DAVID In theater?

QUILL Even if it’s just a resource to pull from.

DAVID I cleave to . . . realism. But that’s sort of one’s own psychological hang-ups, too. I’m not interested in expressionist theater, but

CAMP AND KROEBER

what I'm very moved by is this idea that you can turn yourself into somebody else. And there's a whole technique for doing that. And that's probably related to a whole bunch of basic identity questions.

I think the other thing I really do cleave to, if someone were to send me like a stack of really good realist plays, and plays that didn't ask things of theaters that theaters actually can't do . . . I don't want to direct *The Tempest* and have people be like, "Oh, you found a really good solution to that storm." I'm not interested. You know, unities are useful for proscenia because proscenia are superlimited spaces, and there's not a lot they can do. So if someone sent me a bunch of really good farces or a bunch of really good dramas, and like eight weeks or ten or twelve weeks to actually stage them so well that they seemed absolutely natural . . . I cleave to that value of the artist vanishing completely. That sort of Flaubert idea, can you write it so thoroughly that the author's sort of just gone. I wouldn't leave a trace, no auteur directing, no nothing.

But you need a good play for that, you need enough rehearsal time for that, you need an architecture that will enable that to happen, which only a theater can do. I love that stuff. But you actually can't make theater in a theater. You get three weeks of rehearsal and you get these ridiculous magical realist kind of things that are supposed to be fanciful but are actually just annoying because all the director winds up having to do is find these solutions to impossible problems, because it was workshopped in one space and winds up being staged somewhere else, and they give it to you and are like, "What an opportunity!" and I'm like, "sdc [Stage Directors and Choreographers Society] pays me eight cents an hour to solve this fucking problem, *great*."

So yes, I do cleave to something, but it's a really narrow kind of theater, it's a really narrow definition of what it can do. I don't think it can do much else in that setting. Sorry!

GAVIN So last time we spoke we got to talking about this idea that we then wound up talking to Shannon Jackson about a little bit—about theater as *affirmation*. This is a little different from the kind of notion that the mode of spectatorship, the architecture of seating, forces a kind of affirmative protocol on theater because you have to take care of these people, they're sitting in chairs for a long time. During that conversation you seemed to be saying that theater in this moment is *oriented toward affirmation*, and even if you took the seats away you would still find a way to be affirmative instead of producing a kind of criticality. We were just sort of riffing, but on a couple days' gestation time, does that still feel right to you?

DAVID Yeah, it does, and I don't think that's a bad thing. You know, people who are critical and rude and distant kind of float away to the art world. I believe in an atomized spectatorship, I'm more comfortable with that, you know, and I'm not affirmative. I think the way theater is set up, and it's not just a marketing thing, I think it's a positive thing. I think it's almost impossible to gather people the way theater gathers them.

And I'm not talking about the new Temporary Distortion show. I'm not necessarily talking about this guy's stuff . . .

DAVID *points at JIM, who is apparently still asleep on the floor upstage. JIM extends his arm upward and raises his middle finger toward DAVID.*

But actually . . .

DAVID *notices* JIM's *gesture and returns it.*

. . . actually, I do think people who go to sleep as a theater thing are still going to affirm something about people sleeping together. I think it's in the nature of how it works, and I don't think that's a bad thing, so I think that's one reason why on the one hand there's this impulse of how do we make theater that gets away from theater, but the reason I think it never really gets away from theater for the most part is because there's something that it's not willing to let go of, which is a sense of making things *together*, which is a sense of an institution that's actually going to try to find a community of people to go to your thing.

The values are just the way you go to watch. There were like . . . Dash Snow, hamster nests or whatever at Deitch, and you could take all the drugs that you wanted and everyone would pass out together too, but I don't think they would go for the same reason they would go to Jim's show. Because I don't think that anyone who went to the event at Deitch *trusted* the situation the same way they would basically trust Jim's thing.

And I think that's a good thing. But at the end of the day I think it does wind up being about trust, and it does wind up being about care, and if you don't want to trust anyone and you don't want to be cared for, then you kind of drift away from theater.

But I don't think that value is extricable. I think that every attempt of "I'm gonna be really innovative and radical and hostile . . ." winds up ". . . and you're all gonna come and it's gonna be cool."

You know, "You're all gonna hate me and you're all gonna be shocked but you're all gonna be shocked together."

And I think that's actually kind of nice. So yes, upon a few days' reflection I continue

to think that there is kind of more trust and more care, which is fundamentally an affirmative quality. So that even when theater wants to tear everything down, it can't, because it's about making a new community, I mean this whole practice of an audience to tear everything down *together*.

QUILL *looks at* GAVIN. GAVIN *nods and they both stand, facing the audience.*

GAVIN Well, on that note we're going to decamp to tear it down together at the bar around the corner.

DAVID *stands and exits. The lights shift, and the houselights come up. JIM begins to climb out of his sleeping bag. He places the sleeping bag into the large blue shopping bag. He rolls up his mat and places it into the shopping bag. JIM puts on his coat and scarf.*

JIM *picks up his belongings and exits.*

End of play.