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Devising Performance & Queer Futurity

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Brendan F. Leonard



Photograph by Casey Coulter

The Department of Theater & Dance

TD 483: Honors Project

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Introduction

This project argues that devising performance is an inherently queer and utopian form. In response to recent political movements, such as Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter, which seek to stage dissatisfaction with the systems of late capitalism, I turn to devising performance as a site. Informed by the queer and performance theories of Jose Esteban Munoz, Lee Edelman, and Jill Dolan, I argue that devised theater allows us to process disillusionment, rehearse collectivity, and stage futurity. In conversation with Munoz, I define futurity as an imaginative site that considers what will follow what some scholars suggest will be the inevitable demise of capitalism and its white patriarchal power structures. For example, in “The end of capitalism,” sociologist Michael Mann forewarns, “the end or decline of capitalism might be nigh for America, for the West, for the whole global economy, or for the whole planet earth” (Mann 929). Rather than indulge in this sense of despair, I recognize devised theater as an art form with which to anticipate and perform radical societal restructuring.

Defined by their collaborative authorship, devising processes identify and stage collective politics. A hopeful act, devising allows artists to test new realities. I imagine the convergence of concurrent movements that advocate for minority, queer, and underserved communities, performing a new world beyond intolerance, violence, and diaspora. Devised theater does not offer practical alternatives to reality, but rather explores the possibilities that arise from rejecting capitalist systems in favor of devising structures that meet the needs of the collaborators. My own devising practice is critically hopeful. I honor queer subjectivity in this cultural moment: when the suicide rate for

trans- and gender nonconforming persons is 41% in the United States (Herman)¹. My work pursues a queer utopia; and I propose that devising itself can be considered a radical act of affective labor that prepares a culture for necessary societal dismantling. Space must be created to prepare for a future that will revise assumptions of subjectivity and citizenship in the dominant fiction, when, for example, queer suicide will no longer be a rampant symptom of social order.

A group of dirty hippies taking their clothes off with the Living Theatre planted the seeds of queer utopian performance in the 1960s. In Chapter 1, I reflect on the legacy of Living Theater founders Judith Malina and Julian Beck's utopian directorial practices, which, guided by the desire to create new ways of experiencing society, paved the way for the work of devising itself. As revolutionary energy swells in our culture in 2016, I feel called to the creative processes and practices of devising, as it developed in its over fifty years of history.

With scholar Jose Esteban Munoz as my herald, in Chapter 2, I reveal queer utopia as a theoretical framework with which to interpret devised work and as well as an aesthetic value system that provokes audiences to imagine realities beyond a present that oppresses the queer community and other marginalized populations. I recognize devising as an act of queering subject matter, illuminating new realities by making the familiar strange and the strange familiar.

¹ The prevalence of suicide attempts among respondents to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS), conducted by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and National Center for Transgender Equality, is 41 percent, which vastly exceeds the 4.6 percent of the overall U.S. population who report a lifetime suicide attempt, and is also higher than the 10-20 percent of lesbian, gay and bisexual adults who report ever attempting suicide (Haas).

In Chapter 3, I reflect on the creative processes of two of my own works that enact queer utopia. A hybrid theater and dance work created by an ensemble of performers, *PLAYBALLPLAY* (2015), explored themes of gender, agency, and play and *WHERE YOU AND I BECOMING AND* (2016), a poetry reading, provided a relational aesthetic, a concept from visual art, that provoked audiences to act as collaborators in the live creation of a devised world.

Based on ideas by Munoz and Lee Edelman, I understand queerness as an available methodology for all bodies and identities and as a site for confusion and creation, which I seek to stage in my work. In conceptualizing queerness this way, I argue it is also a site for collectivity bound by a desire to move beyond present oppression toward future jouissance.

Devising inherently resists codification and categorization. Queerness defiantly resists conformity and capitalist productivity. Would it be more appropriate for this thesis to articulate itself in a protest rather than affirm the heteropatriarchal symbolic order of language and citations? Maybe. As deeply personal scholarship, this work made me confront my identities as an artist, scholar, and performer and creatively rearrange my values of empathy, inclusion, and gentleness. Ultimately, I am so grateful for the opportunity to rigorously examine what it is that matters to me: art that suggests a better world. I identify (currently) as a cisgendered gay man. I ask you conceptualize this project always as a personal one and treat it as you would a conversation between you and I, who are both in the process of becoming and

Chapter 1: Foundations for Paradise

“It is not the theatre that is indispensable, but something quite different. To cross the frontiers between you and me.” – Jerzy Grotowski

I recently marched in a protest on the campus of Colby College. “We are unstoppable! Another world is possible!” we cried out. We wanted to arouse awareness of – and inspire a response to – systematic methods of oppression inflicted upon minority students and victims of sexual assault. As a performance artist, I yelled this cry a bit louder than the rest because in my work, I am trying to conceive of and create realities unburdened by the need to cry out for justice, inclusion, and tolerance.

I make devised work; I inherit a history of artists transforming sentiments of dissatisfaction, justice, and hope into practice—into the creation of new worlds in performance. Devised theater first emerged in the United States in the 1960s when the concept of creating a new world felt most culturally alive. Cultural critic Matthew Bannister writes, “part of the power of the 1960s utopian dream was the very familiarity of its rhetoric: terms like freedom, justice, and peace are taken as universal truths enshrined in the US constitution” (Bannister 163). Devising arrived at a time when utopian idealism affected legislative change. The Living Theatre, the Performance Group, and Bread and Puppet Theater made work to counteract the oppressive norms of the 1950s. For more than fifty years, devised performance has been driven by the impulse to construct new ways of experiencing society in hopes to dismantle capitalist systems and suggest utopian alternatives.

Just as current political movements such as Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter harken back to the social upheaval of the 1960s, in this chapter, I examine the historical genesis of devised performance. I begin by defining the term devising, locating its origins with the work of the Living Theatre in 1960s. I articulate the artistic and pragmatic influences that led to their making original work in the style of devising and examine pieces like *The Brig* (1963), *Mysterious and Smaller Pieces* (1964), *Frankenstein* (1965), and their opus *Paradise Now* (1968). In understanding how their methodologies became imprinted on the form, I consider other devising companies and their markers of “success.” Finally, I identify devising as a director’s medium and as the rehearsal room for political revolution.

Defining a New Style

As defined by Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling in *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, the term “devising” refers to a creative process that involves collaboration in the composition of a new performance text (4). They trace devising’s distinction from and association with actor training, visual arts, political theater, community-based theater, physical performance, and post-modernism. Heddon and Milling base their definition on that of the initial comprehensive study on the subject of devising by Allison Oddey. In *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, Oddey focuses on devising as a rejection of text-based theater. In *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*, Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson, and Katie Normington consider the overlapping histories of devising as it applies to theater and dance practices. In considering the many definitions of the term, which are still

evolving, they offer, “one of the recurring themes, evident in the various and disparate histories that have impacted on contemporary devised performance, is practitioners’ commitment to developing conceptual, embodied and often political understandings of performance-making” (Govan 9). I maintain that devising refers to a mode of performance creation with a specific history that begins, as Heddon and Milling suggest, with the work of the Living Theatre in the 1960s (Heddon and Milling 5).

The inception of devised performance coincided with cultural trends such as post-modernism and counter-culture movements that promoted peace, communal living, and psychedelic drug use. In his memoir of his time in the Living Theatre, Tom Walker recounts that, “Something was in the air, as the song went. The tremendous anti-war demos and the mixing of the races in the course of the civil rights struggles propelled youth to define and refine new style” (Walker 15). As part of this style, devising inherits political and artistic traditions that distinguish it as alternative to commercial theater and dance work. The form focuses on experimental methods meant to bring about experiences that transcended a culture bound to materialism. Rarely codified, devising practices vary widely and many techniques of devised performance, including improvisation, are often critical components of traditional creative processes. However, devising as a genre of performance traces a clear history from the work of the Living Theatre, The Performance Group, and Bread and Puppet in the 1960s to the current work of performance companies SITI Company, Headlong, Rude Mechs, and Pig Iron, among others, all of which make hybrid theater and dance work and are connected by the desire to not only make new performances, but also to create new ways of making performance.

When They Started Living

According to Heddon and Milling, the Living Theatre was the first devising company, yet its founders Julian Beck and Judith Malina originally directed play scripts in a traditional manner. These experimental scripts were written by emerging artists of the Beat generation that foreshadowed the hippie movement that followed in the 1960s, which the Living Theatre “epitomized,” according to company member Tom Walker (Walker 14). Carefully selecting material to serve their alternative political agenda, Malina and Beck directed the debut productions of many plays by Bertolt Brecht for American audiences, as well as works by Alfred Jarry, Gertrude Stein, and T.S. Eliot (Wilson 24).

A host of other artistic influences impacted the Living Theatre’s aesthetic. Beck and Malina rented their space on 14th Street in New York City to pioneers of post-modern performance choreographer Merce Cunningham and composer John Cage (Wilson and Goldfarb 32). Cunningham, who formed the Merce Cunningham Dance Company at Black Mountain College in 1953, advocated for “non-representational” choreography, which emphasized pure movement, as opposed to story, or emotion, as in the work of early American moderns such as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Katherine Dunham. Cage put forward any noise as music. He famously composed *4’33’’*, a piece of music performed in silence (Perloff 22-24). Cunningham’s and Cage’s work employed chance procedures, which require performers to adapt to changing circumstances within performance, cultivating similar improvisatory skills that often guide devised work.

Cunningham and Cage collaborated with various kinds of artists, including the painter and collage maker Robert Rauschenberg, painter and printmaker Jasper Johns,

and the pop artist Roy Lichtenstein. These collaborations often led to the creation of what Cunningham referred to as “events,” but resembled what performance artist Alan Kaprow termed, “Happenings.” These “Happenings,” were site-specific performances that often involve several (and usually overlapping) modes of performance that acknowledge and embrace their inability to be recreated (Rodenbeck 23). The shared space between the Living Theatre and other early practitioners of post-modernism in performance, who championed of collaboration and experimental practices, influenced the Living Theatre’s working methods. I argue Cunningham and Cage’s interdisciplinary approach to designing a live event experience applied to the Living Theatre’s understanding of text-based theater helped lead to the development of devising.

Inspired by the creative energy of the likes of Cunningham and Cage, and other artists, the Living Theatre began developing original plays, thus, according to Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb in *Living Theater: A History*, devising practices began emerging in the early 1960s. In 1963, Judith Malina directed *The Brig* by Kenneth Brown. A loosely structured play with little dialogue, the piece depicted the daily routine of Marine Corps. Rehearsals for the play included physically demanding military exercises that could last up to seven hours. This intensive rehearsal process resembled the work of Joan Littlewood, whose Theatre Workshop of England created *Oh, What a Lovely War*, an anti-war musical, the dialogue of which relied on the performers’ improvisation (Govan 47). Both Malina and Littlewood required attendance at political protests as part of their rehearsals. They were expanding on theories of actor training adapted from the Stanislavsky system that called for greater physical and spiritual commitment from the actor.

During the post-war period, many theater artists were experimenting with the level of commitment asked of performers. The Polish theater director Jerzy Grotowski published *Towards a Poor Theater* in 1968, which outlines intensive physical and mental preparations for the actor, including an “eradication” of ego. Because it requires performers to serve as co-authors of performance texts, devised practices reflect a collective politic. Actors are asked to do much more than script memorization; they also contribute critical political thought and fulfill non-performance duties, including, but not limited to design, dramaturgy, and production. Devised performance practitioners often borrow from the work of Grotowski, Antoin Artaud, or Lee Strasberg, who all push for the extremes of actor commitment and attention (Heddon and Milling 32). These developments in actor training coincided with a cultural boom in communal living. Communes of people living and working together in service of shared values emerged and challenged capitalist structures by experimenting with social organizing based on utopian and theoretically communist ideals (Miller 73). From the development of the Living Theatre’s earliest devised works, authorship depended on a connected mind-body political commitment and shared living spaces in the spirit of hippie culture, in service of embodying alternative politics.

In addition to the commitment to artistic principals, the Living Theatre developed devising methodologies pragmatically from circumstances. Though *The Brig* was a critical and commercial success, following its run, the Living Theatre was evicted from their space for refusing to pay taxes on their space, propelling a European tour (Wilson 90). While on this tour, the company, spending much time together, shared a practice of yoga and meditation as part of their rehearsal process, while collectively reading the

writings of Artaud. The Living Theatre was a lifestyle, as well as a theater company. When the company began devising their own work, they exposed audiences to a way of living that existed beyond the stage.

In 1964, *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* marked the Living Theatre's first presentation of a purely devised performance. While touring in Europe, a Paris venue asked the company for a performance in exchange for rehearsal space (Wilson 93). Malina directed a piece that emerged from the company's rehearsal process. *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* consisted of nine "ritual games" that included scenes of yoga and meditation, improvised tableaux, and an attempt to physicalize metaphors written by Artaud. The piece asked for audience participation and made explicit references to political concerns, including the Korean War. The piece included structures from the work's rehearsal process and in doing so, exemplified a post-modern aesthetic of revealing theatrical artifice (Heddon and Milling 154). One of the nine games included in *Mysteries* was a sound-movement exercise developed by Lee Worley of the Open Theatre, which involves an actor imitating and adapting a noise and gesture made by another performer and then transferring the task to someone else (Living Theater). The ways in which devised performance reveals its composition is a distinguishing characteristic of the work, as are the lack of coherent narrative and the inclusion of game structures.

Julian Beck directed the Living Theatre's next piece, *Frankenstein*. Beck wrote the following in the proposal to the Venice Biennale:

There is no text for the play. The action, the words, the effects will all be created by the company working together with the techniques we have

developed amongst ourselves ... a work in the tradition of Artaud's concept of a non-literary theatre ... through ritual, horror, and spectacle (Heddon and Milling 38).

Beck's sentiment here proposes devised performance as a non-literary form. Though a performance text is composed, it is collectively authored, which makes it largely dependent on the abilities of the artists and the circumstances under which it is created and will be performed. Members of the Living Theatre discussed approaches to Mary Shelley's novel. Due to a lack of a singular vision, devising methodologies often lead to performances that avoid the traditional Freytag pyramid of dramatic structure, disinterested in telling the story of a single protagonist. The work may be a response to specific source material, such as *Frankenstein*, yet the process of devising recontextualizes the material and fragments narrative, thereby requiring audiences to access story with new faculties. *Frankenstein* explored social violence and drew on cultural archetypes from popular culture. Devising sacrifices unity of time and place in favor of creating work that speaks to the moment it appears. The Living Theatre's *Frankenstein* transformed a timeless classic into fodder for timely commentary revealed in a hodgepodge of thematically related material.

Anticipating the Post-Textual

Devised performance's treatment of language distinguishes the form from the traditional literary theater, which values above all else, dialogue and the actor's ability to clearly and effectively communicate language. By experimenting with literary traditions, early devised theater anticipates the cultural trend that Douglas Lanier calls the "post-

textual.” In his 2011 article “Post-Textual Shakespeare,” Lanier examines how Shakespeare adaptations in the late twentieth century and early twenty first century respond to the postmodern experience, defined by, “what W.J. T. Mitchell has called the ‘the pictorial turn’ in late twentieth century culture, a decisive shift in the relative ratios of image and word in the dominant media of our day. Those media – advertising, film, television, the Internet – offer more information visually and with greater visual density” (Lanier 148). New technologies allow greater control over the content of images than ever before and audiences are expected to process images at greater speeds. Lanier identifies visual literacy as a crucial part of the postmodern experience.

The process of devising from source material is an application of performative abstraction, transforming literature into visual and physical language. The Living Theatre’s *Frankenstein* abstracted Shelley’s novel and relied on visual language, compiling images from cultural iconography to form a performative meditation on the nature of social violence. Devised performance practitioners pointedly devalue language as *a* tool among many in their creative process, which is partially a response to Antonin Artaud, who, in *The Theatre and Its Double*, theoretically attacks the “supremacy” of language (34). As they developed *Frankenstein*, the Living Theatre began defining themselves as “a collective, living and working together toward the creation of a new form of nonfictional acting based on the actor’s political and physical commitment to using theater as a medium for furthering social change” (Living). Their focus on individual agency within communal living manifests itself in devised performance, which rejects singularity in favor of collaboration. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the novel, exists as storytelling by a lone subjective voice, which presents itself with objective

authority. The Living Theatre's *Frankenstein* accommodates and presents the many overlapping subjective voices of its collaborators, leading to work that values plurality. To synthesize competing interests, while seeking a sense of presentational cohesion, the Living Theatre developed performance structures that present sequences of events and participatory activities, as opposed to traditional scenes. The dramatic structure of devised performances varies from piece to piece, for the material dictates the structure. Devising is an art of creating both performance form and content.

Staging Paradise

In 1968, the Living Theatre premiered its most famous work, *Paradise Now*, which emerged from their developing devising methodologies and marked their return to the United States. After *Frankenstein*, the company, though invested in creating original work, staged Bertolt Brecht's *Antigone*, his adaptation of the Sophocles play. This alternating of purely devised work and adaptation became characteristic of future companies like the Tectonic Theater Project or SITI Company, for, as Heddon and Milling note, "Devised performance lies on a continuum with script work" (39). A radical approach to dramaturgy, *Paradise Now* was a response to and in conversation with anti-Vietnam war protests. While in Europe, the company became influenced by the riots in Paris in May of 1968, as well as by the work of Jean-Jacques Lebel, a radical figure in the development of Parisian performance art. As research, the company read utopian myths and spiritual writings, experimented with drug use, engaged in yoga and physical exercises, and discussed their ideas of paradise. All of these activities became fodder for the Grotowski-inspired performance. The rehearsal process consciously provoked a

transcendent experience for the performers, who sought to expand their consciousness in hopes of discovering a higher power, which would illuminate how to transform a society plagued with violence. The performers sought to devise an experience for audiences that would cultivate this transcendence in performance, allowing for all gathered at the live event to share in a discovery of transformation.

The resulting work from the Living Theatre's process involved nudity, drug use, and in some special cases, orgies. The primary goal for the Living Theatre in this piece was revolution. They wanted audiences to carry insights and discoveries into the streets, bringing about social change. In fact, the final "rite" of the performance demanded audience members take to the streets, motivated to incite rebellion. The performance compelled audiences to remove clothing and join in communal chanting in an attempt to strip away the markers of oppressive capitalist society, reborn into a new society of his or her own devising. Energized and united by self-discovery, the audience exited the theater to play out their personal utopia on the capitalist stage of the street. However, as the history of devising performance would follow, these discoveries, though individually enlightening, failed to bring about utter societal dismantling, thus the work continues. The future remains to be devised.

Hope in Devising

The hopes intrinsic in *Paradise Now* laid a foundation for devised work as a site to embody alternative political ideology with the goal to bring about social action through enacting a utopian aesthetic. Devised performance presents the opportunity for artists to collaborate in imagining alternative realities that could exist in response to present

realities bound by capitalist structures. Devising is distinct from the socially conscious work of theater artists like Bertolt Brecht because of its focus on collaboration and presentation of multiple subjectivities. As historically initiated by the Living Theatre, devising speaks to the performance theories of Jill Dolan, who in *Utopia in Performance* asks:

Why do people come together to watch other people labor on stage, when contemporary culture solicits their attention with myriad other forms of representation and opportunities for social gathering? Why do people continue to seek the liveness, the present-tenseness that performance and theatre offer? Is the desire to be there, in the moment, an expression of a utopian impulse? (Dolan 455).

As a utopian impulse, devised performance exists as a conscious social gathering, which through abstracted narratives and layered meanings invites audiences to ponder and create, along with the performers, new realities. If certain structures and experiences can exist in performance, they may become social reality. Devised performance seeks an audience that, in the postmodern tradition, works to create their own meaning and desire a living experience, as opposed to watching film or television. The goal for devised performance is empowering insight, as opposed to entertainment, though the two are not mutually exclusive. To provoke this response, devised work, ascribing to the theories of Grotowski, seeks to keep the theater “poor,” or interested in storytelling that makes use of performance faculties and disinterested in spectacle and realism (Grotowski 21).

Alternative to the commercial entertainment industry, devising usually results in work on a spectrum between community-based storytelling and experimental high art.

Devising Companies

Often founded on distinct political and aesthetic ideologies, devising companies create work collectively, sharing in artistic and practical responsibilities. The work struggles with issues of cohesion, as do the company structures that seek to accommodate diverse individual interests. Few of these companies sustain longevity and those that do often conform idealized, communal governing structures to more business-oriented models in order to survive in the arts and entertainment industry. “As Joan Littlewood’s and Julian Beck’s memoirs make clear, the life of an unsubsidized or poorly subsidized theatre company, particularly one which places politics and aesthetics over profit, is one of continual draining struggle” (Heddon and Milling 20). Devising companies are experiments in political structure. Each is founded on a set of values that influences how authority is distributed. In a capitalist sociopolitical context, when companies become more “successful,” they inevitably concede principals in order to survive. If they do not, companies exist like their performances – as ephemeral entities. Director Joseph Chaikin, for example, disbanded The Open Theatre in 1973 to pursue commercial projects with Joseph Papp’s Public Theater (Heddon and Milling 44).

The Living Theatre thrived for years and made a significant impact on performance history, but the company began declining after arrests of several company members in Brazil following performances of *Paradise Now* in 1971. Disagreements among company members further fueled the demise. Rufus Collins, a Black performer, felt marginalized by the group and received criticism from the Black Panthers for his perpetuating pacifist politics (Heddon and Milling 43). The legacy of *Paradise Now*

leading to arrests for indecent exposure and the Living Theatre's demise following its most celebrated work certainly impacted the voracity with which the next generation of performance artists commented on the structures of society. Heddon and Milling theorize the shifting interests of devised work from the 1960s and 70s to the 1980s:

Coinciding with the demise of any belief in, or commitment to, the ideals of an alternative society, technological developments – in particular in media and widespread consumption of television and home videos – undoubtedly had an impact on live performance. Where the work in the 1960s and 1970s had tended to be deliberately 'rough,' 'chaotic,' and/or provocative, often aiming to involve the spectator in a visceral or emotive experience, by the 1980s it had become visually polished and marketable, and often a product for the European theatre circuit (Heddon and Milling 93).

As an inherently political form, devised performance, in its structuring and urgency, depends on the political ideology surrounding alternative forms of government. In the post-war period, devised performance became a zone to explore socialist principals. During the conservative Reagan era in the United States, devised performance explored new realities made available by technology. Goat Island of Chicago and Forced Entertainment of the United Kingdom both formed in the 80s. In the 1990s, devised performance adopted political questions raised by Black, gay, and feminist artists. Examples of devising companies formed in the 1990s include Pig Iron in Philadelphia and Rude Mechs in Austin, Texas. Heddon and Milling write that, "Where the companies of the 1980s might for example, argue for 'gay rights,' in the 1990s the term 'gay,' and

our assumptions of what that meant, would itself be taken as the ground to be challenged” (129). American devised performance endured the conservative Bush administration, as performances made sense of the increasing impact of the Internet on society, including its influence on the transnational exchange of information and culture.

City vs. Country: Where Can Utopia Be?

Many of the companies I’ve mentioned work in urban settings, which experience large economic trends most directly. The Bread and Puppet Theater, which formed in 1963 by Peter Schumann, began working in New York City on the Lower East Side in a \$60/month rented loft on Delancey Street. The company originated with principals that advocated for integrating art practice into daily life, linking the creation of art with the baking of bread (Govan 42). The company constructed large puppets not only for their performances, but also for protests and demonstrations against the U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia and against the Vietnam War. Bread and Puppet devised pageants in the poorest neighborhoods in the city as to draw attention to social inequities, becoming a force in the activist community (Heddon and Milling 30). Their piece, *Fire*, the politics of which strongly opposed the Vietnam War, earned international attention at the Nancy Theater Festival in France:

This launched the [Bread and Puppet] theater into international prominence and helped secure over a decade of seasonal touring in Europe and beyond. During this period, Bread & Puppet was often associated with the New American Theater – a loose-knit avant-garde movement that included companies as diverse as the Living Theatre, The San Francisco

Mime Troupe, Robert Wilson and others. Schumann had come to the States informed in part by the European avant-garde, and in New York was exposed to the Dada influenced work of Cage and Cunningham; the early happenings of Oldenburg, Kaprow, Grooms, et al; Fluxus; and the Judson Dance theater (Bread and Puppet).

To a larger degree than the Living Theatre, Bread and Puppet continues to thrive and make work based off their founding principals due to their relocation to rural Vermont, where the company lives and works on a commune. Without competing with other performance companies, Bread and Puppet can afford space and resources that are fought over in urban settings. Their vision of utopian structures can more easily exist when unburdened by economic pressures, allowing for the company to retain communal organization and creative processes. Other companies that thrive in rural settings include Double Edged Theatre in Ashford, Massachusetts and The Ghost Road Company in Culver City, California and numerous community theaters that make devised work as an economical alternative to licensed plays and as a community-building endeavor.

Directing Devising

Many companies begin with egalitarian authorship, but grow to acknowledge particular artists, usually directors who emerge, in lieu of the playwright, as the work's author. Heddon and Milling write that, "despite their resistance to conventional hierarchies, many groups had strong directors," so companies that began with utopian principals of collaboration developed toward what Arnold Aronson referred to as "the model of the totalitarian phase of communism" (Heddon and Milling 61). Most of the

devising companies that survive forfeit authority to one or two artistic directors, as is the case of Elizabeth LeCompte of the Wooster Group, Lloyd Newson of DV8 Physical Theater, and Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki of the Saratoga International Theater Institute (SITI). When devising, the director becomes the curator of the performer-generated material, responsible for the cohesion of the performed assemblage of games, experiences, and material generated during the rehearsal process. Thus, the artistic success of a devised work is often credited to the director. Their experience of the work unites the collection of performer subjectivities that construct the material. The director molds the performance text to present the realities gleaned in the process to an audience.

The director also provides the prompts that generate material for performance, often in the form of improvisatory structures. Thus, the directors, though not authors, offer the impetus for the performance text. Directors Anne Bogart of SITI Company and Tina Landau of Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago codified a set of techniques for performance composition in *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*. Adapted from the work of Mary Overlie, their nine viewpoints of performance, divided by those of time and of space, include tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, shape, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, and topography. The book is a guide for all types of collaborators involved in devised theater, but it is primarily for directors, providing tools with which they may translate a new world discovered in the rehearsal room to an audience.

Devising as Training

The Tectonic Theater Project, which famously devised *The Laramie Project* following the murder of gay teen Matthew Shepard, is in the process of codifying what they term, “Moment Work,” with training workshops at various locations in the country. Viewpoints classes are similarly offered in cities and universities. As devised performance methodologies become more common in actor training, companies rely on education to bring in revenue, in addition to their performances. Pig Iron in collaboration with the University of the Arts launched an M.F.A. program in devised performance in 2015, which marked devising’s official entrance into academia as a discipline. In yet, in its roots, devising is a process of creative dismantling, sooner to protest rather than to preoccupy itself with institutions.

With Malina and Beck’s utopian idealism in mind, I argue devised theater continues to revise how to make and experience performance in service of anticipating political revolution. Reacting to contemporary sociopolitical movements and an oncoming presidential election that signals doom, I cry out for devising to create new realities now. As a student at the Headlong Performance Institute in Philadelphia, I developed skills in making devised work. In doing so, I began articulating my own alternative politic that I seek to reveal in my art practice and in these pages. Inspired by a history of living theater, I devise queer utopia.

Chapter 2

Devising as Queering

“Capitalism is the predominant conceptual system configuring and forming our reality. It is difficult, perhaps almost impossible, to image another one, because we are immersed in the conceptual approaches of its reality, the one of capitalism. Art is able to represent, symbolically and accurately this conceptual reality, but also to encourage us to imagine other realities.” - Mariano O. de Blais, “Symbolic Spaces in Late Capitalism”

“All I ask is the chance to build new worlds and God has always given us that second chance, and has given us voices to guide us; and the memory of our mistakes to warn us.” – Thornton Wilder, *The Skin of Our Teeth*

This is the project of devised performance: to create new worlds by tapping into sensibilities beyond present oppression. I argue the creation of new worlds must be guided by an inner queer voice that devising methodologies innately cultivate. As a historical alternative to commercial performance work, devised performance is a site of alternative politics, offering performers and audiences glimpses of realities possible, but not-yet-here. In 2016, this is an appealing sentiment: that new worlds can be created, considering the increasing hostility towards queer, minority, and immigrant communities in the United States, resulting in widespread violence. In 2015, there were more transgender homicide victims than in any year on record and most of the victims were transwomen of color (Stafford). Listening to an inner queer voice, we must devise worlds

that structurally protect, rather than massacre citizens, in hopes waking reality will wake up.

In this chapter, I link devising with Jill Dolan's notion of the "utopian performative," to argue that devising is creative dismantling, or queering, and provokes an individual meaning-making process in an audience. After introducing the concept of futurity as discussed by queer theorists Jose Esteban Munoz and Lee Edelman, I offer "queer futurity" as a framework and aesthetic value system with which to interpret and create devised performances. Lastly, to model my performance research, I examine three contemporary artists, Miguel Gutierrez, Ann Liv Young, and Tere O'Connor as devisers of queer utopia.

Devising Beyond Capitalism

By rejecting traditional Western production processes and dramatic structuring, devised performance rejects capitalist politics. Devised performance, as a collaborative and collectively authored endeavor, devalues realism, as it imposes a single, unified subjectivity. Though bound by this rejection, each devised process involves the creation of new structures, which define both the process and product of the work, thus embodying an original, experimental politic. The liminal space of performance allows for a vision of a different reality that disobeys capitalist – and proposes new societal structures, as evidenced in *Paradise Now* by the Living Theatre, which created a space free from restrictions on public nudity, drug use, and sex.

Jill Dolan dubs the notions that audiences could be compelled to take action by performance the "utopian performative." This notion finds precedent in the socially

conscious work of Bertolt Brecht, but differs in its generative aesthetic. Though Brecht created work that criticized the present in hopes to stir critical thought thus political action, his plays did not offer a vision of a better reality. The Living Theatre, in their treatment of Brecht's *Antigone*, applied a utopian aesthetic. In an interview with Mark Amitin, Judith Malina said, "theatrical utopianism is a great desire that we've plunged ourselves into, but *Antigone* is a sad play, a tragedy, for that reason. What we see today is a play for nonviolence where what we saw thirteen years ago was a play for revolution – now it's certainly a plea for both" (Beck 34). The utopian performative is a desire for revolution through creative, rather than destructive acts. Paradoxically, the work of devising is creative dismantling that builds a future, which revises the oppression of the present. Dolan explains:

Utopian performatives persuade us that beyond this "now" of material oppression and unequal power relations lives a future that might be different, one whose potential we can feel as we're seared by the promise of a present that gestures toward a better later. The affective and ideological "doings" we see and feel demonstrated in utopian performatives also critically rehearse civic engagement that could be effective in the wider public and political realm (Dolan 7).

Several performances of *Paradise Now* concluded with performers and audiences taking to the streets in hopes to bring about revolution. As Dolan discusses, performance is hopeful in that if structures can exist in performance, structures imbued with lessons learned from capitalism's failures that cause systematic racism and violence, then they

may exist in waking reality. The response to *Paradise Now* remains an ideal: immediate, affective, and nonviolent revolution within the audience.

Devised performance draws attention to the dynamics of the live event as a social gathering. Jill Dolan argues that, “live performance provides a place where people come, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning-making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world” (Dolan 164). However, as the art of devising has evolved in its over fifty-years of history, it seems that the many constructed realities that arise from the practice are also themselves ephemeral. Devised performances, like *Paradise Now* or *Dionysus in '69* (1969) by the Performance Group that transformed Euripides’ *The Bacchae* into a participatory ritual, have been fleeting suggestions against capitalism.

As capitalism remains the dominant system, devised performance will remain alternative and inherently experimental. In taking on what Mariano O. de Blais calls an “almost impossible” task of imagining beyond capitalism, many devised worlds ascribe to the mantra credited to the German poet Novalis of “making the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (Krell 292). When I suggest that devised performances are new worlds, I am not suggesting these worlds are total in their rejection of society. In fact, many devised performances borrow from the traditions of naturalism and realism, but these qualities often contrast with the lack of coherence inherent in collaborative authorship. The devised work *The Method Gun* (2010) by the Rude Mechs features a talking tiger, dance sections, moments in which the performers address the audience directly, and conventional realism in acting scenes from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The alternating of those disparate elements serves to reorient and disorient audience.

Texts by one author offer a singular subjectivity that dictates the poetics and structure of the work and often lend themselves to realism. When many overlapping subjectivities create the text, narrative is sacrificed for non-linearity, which invites audiences to interpret and imagine a unified reality of their own devising. Devised worlds are realized in the relationship between the performance and the spectator, which is mediated by the work of the director. Devising practitioners' work is objectively undefined, or as I would characterize it, queer, for meaning is an individual endeavor for each person gathered at the event. Within the liminal space of devised performances, a new reality can be suggested for each audience member. Devising is an exercise in critical hope. It is an act that theorist Jose Esteban Munoz would identify as "queer utopian."

Introducing Queer Futurity

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Munoz defines queerness as "a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see beyond the quagmire of the present" that is in service of "dream[ing] and enact[ing] new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds" (1). His framework relies on theoretical utility by Ernst Bloch, who makes a distinction between abstract and concrete utopias, valuing abstract utopias only insofar as they pose a critical function that fuels a critical and potentially transformative political imagination (Bloch 341). Munoz conflates Bloch's conceptions of utopia with the writings of J. L. Austin, who dismisses the true/false dichotomy that structures Western metaphysics in favor of asserting the distinction between the felicitous and infelicitous. In *How to Do Things*

With Words, Austin articulates that felicitous speech acts do something and say something, they beget a performed response, yet as Austin argues that every speech act contains failure – or infelicity (25). Munoz explains, “Bloch’s hope resonates with Austin’s notion of the felicitous insofar as it is always disappointed. The eventual disappointment of hope is not a reason to forsake it as a critical thought process, in the same way that even though we can know in advance that felicity of language ultimately falters, it is nonetheless essential” (9-10). Munoz compares hope and queerness as modes of desire that anticipate and persist because and despite of failure.

Munoz looks to performances defined by structures not-yet-here to outline a queer utopian aesthetic marked by potentiality and failure. Munoz differentiates possibility, a thing that might happen, from potentiality, a mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense. Failure, for Munoz, signals potentiality by drawing attention to both queerness’ disjuncture within a capitalist value system of success and queerness’ celebration of a value system that may emerge, that exists in futurity. He cites Fred Herko of the Judson Memorial Church, Jack Smith, and Andy Warhol as early practitioners of this aesthetic.

Dissent in Futurity

Munoz’s understanding of futurity responds to an anti-relational trend in queer theory illuminated by Lee Edelman in *No Future*. For Edelman, heteronormative society structures itself in denial of death, in belief that the present will continue to exist in the future through reproduction. Hence, capitalism continues generation to generation, as meaning is monetized and passed down. Edelman suggests that the queer cannot and

should not participate in capitalist society because he does not participate in reproductive futurity, thus he cannot enjoy the jouissance in normative society. The queer is a social outcast because hir presence is a reminder of death, of the inevitable end of the individual here-and –now. Hir presence is a disjuncture within the structuring of society that brings about a cultural anxiety, which has historically manifested itself in the systematic methods of oppression inflicted upon queer persons. Both Edelman and Munoz reject the notion of homonormativity. Homonormativity refers to LGBTQ persons assimilating to capitalist structures. Both theorists argue doing so affirms systems never designed for their experience. They encourage queer persons to instead develop systems of their own. Edelman advocates for each queer person to embrace hir position outside the larger society and develop an individual identity that dispels reproductive futurity for an exploration of present jouissance.

Edelman argues capitalist society projects its hopes for the future in the child, so the future cannot belong to the queer who does not reproduce. Meanwhile, Munoz calls for collectivity, in order to rehearse a queer future. He recognizes performance as a site offering access to futurity defined by utopian inclusivity and jouissance instead of by reproduction. Performing queerness is a felicitous act then, critical of the present in hopes of discovering new structures that allow for and foster new ways of being in the world.

Queer Utopia as Aesthetic

In this essay, I put forward devising performance as a practice that enacts the queer utopian aesthetic. I recognize collectivity in the form's collaborative authorship. Devising rejects capitalist structures in favor of discovering new methods of

performance, thus new ways of experiencing reality through shared personal forays into queerness. Devising processes queer Western dramatic structuring and encourage artists to fulfill multiple roles, thus valuing multiplicity and communality. The results of the work are living examples of alternative value systems that offer audiences the opportunity to creatively engage with and share in ideas of utopia. In *Pagan Rights* (2006), a music video by Los Angeles-based performance trio My Barbarian, three young people enter the woods, become mythological beasts, and transform again into “funky queer neohippies” who dance around a maypole. As they dance, a voice pronounces this performance presents:

“A queer utopianism that counters the dead-end temporality of straight time ... This performance imagines a time and place outside the stultifying hold of the present by calling on a mythical past where we can indeed imagine the defying of Christian totalitarianism, where we spin in concentric circles that defy linear logic where one’s own ego is sacrificed for a collective dignity, where queer bodies receive divine anointment, where the future is actively imagined, where our dying natural world can be revived and once again, where collectively we follow our spirits”

(Munoz 179).

This work presents a clear queer utopian aesthetic, offering suggestions of another world based on a queer value system that celebrates transcendence. My own performance research, which I discuss in the following chapter, attempts to incorporate audiences as performers of queer utopia.

Queer Utopia as Framework

I argue that the practice of devising theater embodies the queer utopian aesthetic, even if the resulting work does not follow as it does in *Pagan Rights*. For example, New Paradise Laboratories (NPL) premiered *The Adults*, at the Philadelphia Fringe Festival in 2014. Inspired Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* by and the paintings of Eric Fischl, NPL created a reality far from utopia: characters drunkenly wet themselves, struggling with primal impulses. The piece does not present glimpses of a reality not-yet-here, or if it does, it is a cautionary tale about how certain persisting systems could infect society. Rather than hope, *The Adults* functions on an aesthetic of cynicism. Vain, technologically dependent, and naively privileged characters ask audiences to reflect on their own realities. Glimpses of new realities may emerge in this process of critique. Though the world of *The Adults* does not offer suggestions of a queer value system, the gesture of its creation I argue classifies as a queer utopian impulse. The following is the mission statement of New Paradise Laboratories. The Living Theatre's legacy continues to persist, as evidenced by the NPL's focus on visual language, interdisciplinary practices, and creating original methodologies that appear in the work:

New Paradise Laboratories is an experimental performance ensemble that explores radical means of expression to bend and reshape conventional ideas of theatre. We imagine theatre as visionary experience. We use a variety of creative strategies including company-devising techniques, cross-media design elements, and site-specific installation. Our pieces value sudden inspiration, paradigm shifts, and shocks to the system. The

collaborative environment of our working process influences the content of our pieces. (New Paradise Laboratories).

Devising is a queer utopian impulse, for the practice is based on the discovery of new worlds created by transforming the traditional, normative, and familiar in favor of formulating and subscribing to an original logic. NPL may create a world that amalgamates problematic societal qualities, but in doing so, they offer audiences access to familiar themes. In their devised world full of cynicism, there is hope.

To devise new theater is to play with the tools of performance, to experiment with presence, and to resist capitalistic coercions of order. I argue the queer utopian aesthetic is present in all devising because it is a process of queering dramatic structure to construct new realities, which are either utopian, or suggest utopia through a process of critique. The manifestations of the aesthetic are not always explicit in performance; however, a queer utopian lens illuminates the potential worlds that emerge from the encounter of performers and audience that would keep safe and promote queer subjectivity. Devising companies are structured queer utopias, collectives of like-minded artists who sequester themselves away from the commercial performance industry to develop new kind of methodologies.

It must be acknowledged that queer utopia never fully manifests itself. It remains a conceptual ideal suggested at by an aesthetic marked by ornamentalism, failure, and artifice (Munoz 40). These qualities counteract capitalist ideals of functionality, success, and authenticity. A queer utopian framework does not collapse on failure to adhere to all its components, but succeeds so long as it suggests new realities, which reject present systems of oppression and account for queer subjectivity. I argue devising processes

require collaborators to acknowledge queer subjectivity by engaging in collaborative authorship and developing new methodologies for creation. I define “queer,” not necessarily as it relates to gender identity, but as a site of creative indeterminacy, which I explore in my performance research discussed in chapter 3.

The comingling of a queer utopian aesthetic and devising methodologies are not exclusive to collaborative companies, but also to individual artists, such as Miguel Gutierrez, Ann Liv Young, and Tere O’Connor. Gutierrez recently completed a three-part series of new works, *Age & Beauty*, which explored themes of queerness, aging, and art making. He describes *Part 1: Mid-Career Artist Suicide Note or &:-/* as, “suggesting modes of communication and relations where hyper-emotional affect is not only the conceptual and choreographic core of the performance, but also the only hope for continuing in this fucked up world” (Gutierrez). Gutierrez creates a space that allows for queer catharsis. Young, on the other hand, is not interested in making her audience feel welcome and comfortable. Staging gratuitous material like live defecation, if an audience member dare make their discomfort known, Young stops the performance to ask what is wrong. She confronts the audience, forcing an articulation of the value system that would deem her art improper. “Tere O’Connor’s choreography finds its logic outside the realm of “translation,” operating in a sub-linguistic area of expression. He views dance as a system with its own properties; an abstract documentary form that doesn’t search to depict. The lenses of western culture, spoken language or dance history, often used to “interpret” dance, are subsumed into layers of the work and decentralized” (O’Connor).

O'Connor is interested in subverting traditional expectations for how dance is comprehended, thus he devises work that appears to be dance from a slightly unfamiliar world, perhaps a utopia adjacent to our waking reality.

Each of these artists' work owes much to the legacy of the Living Theatre and to the development of a history of collaborative and interdisciplinary performance authorship known as devising, which idealizes alternative politics, innovation, and transformative presence. Though their work is accredited to a single name usually with some mention of the performers involvement, collaboration, as it exists in the history of devised performance, is essential for these artists' practice. I model my performance research off artists like Gutierrez, Young, and O'Connor, who serve as the primary director/choreographer of a collaborative devising process enacting queer utopia.

Chapter 3

Staging Futurity

“You cannot create results. You can only create conditions in which something might happen.” – Anne Bogart, A Director Prepares

Over the past year, I devised two performances, which purposefully embody queer utopia, *PLAYBALLPLAY* (2015) and *WHERE YOU AND I BECOMING AND* (2016). In my devising practice, queer utopia manifests itself both as a theoretical framework and aesthetic value system. I argue both can apply to any given devised work, yet artists may or may not deliberately enact the concept. Devisers like the Rude Mechs are not consciously subscribing to a queer utopian aesthetic, though ideas from queer theory can be applied to their work. I hypothesized that a conscious application of this framework and aesthetic to a devising process would facilitate a generative experience for audiences and performers, offering both access to a utopian notion of queerness.

As the processes unfolded, I experimented with the role of the director and definitions of “audience” and “performers” and developed devising methodologies of my own. My collaborators and I relied on improvisation as the primary tool for generating material. The resulting pieces offered an aesthetic of ephemera, comparing the filmed versus performing body, and explored themes of gender and belonging. This nexus of theory and practice attempts to stage a queer presence, to make palpable a sense of what Munoz terms the “not-yet-here, a utopian feeling” (Munoz 4). Queerness as an experience is marked by longing, which I sought to cultivate in the performers through an improvisatory practice guided by the desire to discover. Both pieces provoke an

individual meaning-making process within all gathered at the live event that works toward a generative collectivity.

In this chapter, I discuss the process of devising *PLAYBALLPLAY* and how a queer utopian framework guided my decisions as a director. After analyzing the resulting performance text, I revisit the creative research and thinking that led the composition of “Where You and I Becoming And,” which became the text of what I refer to as a “devising” performance of the same name. I use the term “devising” because the work was devised by the audience as the performance proceeded. I conclude with reflections on *WHERE YOU AND I BECOMING AND*, as I look forward to creating future devised work.

PLAYBALLPLAY (2015) Process

The process of *PLAYBALLPLAY* began with an open workshop that offered prospective performers a sense of the work. Of the ten participants, six agreed to take part in the process, which lasted for a semester and consisted of three phases: exploring, sequencing, and editing. The guiding mantra for the work, I learned at the Headlong Performance Institute, “I see you seeing me,” became an inner intention for the performers that I reiterated at the beginning of each rehearsal. I consciously created a space in which the performers could develop a personal performative self, their own “I” in “I see you seeming me,” without fear of failure, for, as is the queer utopian aesthetic, failure deserves celebration because failure signal a disjuncture within capitalist systems. There were no predetermined goals for each rehearsal other than to deepen a collective presence. If the performers needed bodywork to comfort aching muscles, or to talk

through an issue on their minds, or nap, the rehearsal room was a space to do so toward developing queerness, which I believe requires tenderness. I sought to create a “safe space;” but, as the Roestone Collective discusses in “Safe Space: Towards a Reconceptualization,” that term is inherently paradoxical. They advocate for creators of safe spaces to chiefly consider context in their cultivating how relations should function within a given space. I established the rehearsal room as safe space within the context of creating a queer utopia. I also made clear that what occurred in the room became fodder for the resulting piece, as is the context of a rehearsal room in a devised process. Anything that occurred could end up in the work.

Each rehearsal began with a “blank canvas,” which is a practice I encountered at the Headlong Performance Institute. The term, borrowed from visual art, refers to an improvisatory score with no restrictions. As scholar Anna Held Adette attests in *The Blank Canvas: Inviting the Muse*, “there is nothing more inhibiting than an empty canvas” (Adette 4). Director Anne Bogart in *And Then You Act* explains artistic inhibition, writing that, “the act of making a choice shuts down possibilities for other choices” (Bogart 42). As soon as a performer makes a choice within a blank canvas, countless potential realities vanish, but in doing so, one takes shape. A blank canvas is the spontaneous creation of a performance world, thus structures and systems arise. Occasionally, I, as director, select a song to play to time the duration of the canvas, meant to get that first frightening choice out of the way, as the music sets a mood and provides context. Influenced by the music or freed by silence, the impulses of the performers author spontaneous performance text. I, as audience, responded with my observations and encouraged sensitivity to the systems and structures that I saw emerging. I also

encouraged the group to work toward a sense of cohesion in their spontaneity through deep attention. I included a consistent practice of improvisation in the rehearsal schedule, so performers could develop group awareness by becoming familiar with their own habits and those of their collaborators.

My working methodology quite resembles what Annie Kloppenberg terms “post-control” choreography, which is “a modulated, deliberate transfer of control from choreographer to dancer that relies on the moments in which choreographers loosen their grip on the whole, give dancers agency and freedom, allow a piece to develop its own identity, and become audience to their own work-in-process” (Kloppenberg). The performers varied in terms of experience from having worked in similar creative processes before to their first stage appearance. Three performers were trained in contemporary dance, one in acting, one in theatrical design, and one entirely inexperienced. Kloppenberg applies “post-control” choreography to professional contemporary dance companies. I, subscribing to queer utopian aesthetic, allowed for mundane choice making that did not exhibit any acting or dance training. I wanted to create a performance world that any audience member could imagine entering with the faculties already available to them. Performing in *PLAYBALLPLAY* ultimately required considerable skill in performance improvisation and embodied presence, yet I purposely edited moments that might distance the audience.

After a blank canvas, the group discussed moments that stood out as possible fodder for constructing our queer utopia, moments that suggested another world. We restaged these moments guided by my direction. I filmed all the material generated, so I could later look for overarching trends and themes. Crucially, I, as the director, never

authored any material. Occasionally, in addition to blank canvases, I led structured improvisations that offered variety to the generating process and perspectives from noted artists who work with dance improvisation, such as Richard Bull, Ismael Houston-Jones, and Deborah Hay. These choreographers developed structures that embody what feminist scholar Susan Foster refers to as “improvisation as radical politics” (Foster 101). I directed their structures, applying the radical politic of queer utopia by encouraging the performers to improvise with sustained indeterminacy. Writing on Bloch’s theories of educated hope, Munoz suggests, “hope’s methodology (with its pendent, memory) dwells in the region of the not-yet, a place where entrance and, above all, final content are marked by an enduring indeterminacy” (Munoz 3). The challenge of this work is to collaborate through deep attention, creating cohesion without imposing narrative. I sought to guide my collaborators into a performance mode attentive to action and to one another, but in pursuit of mysterious goals, a queer presence alive in the unknown.

Introducing Affect Theory

Upon completion of the exploring phase of the process, I reviewed all the rehearsal footage. I observed trends and analyzed the material in pursuit of themes, motifs, and moments imbued with queer potentiality. Rejecting dramatic structure, I wanted to create an assemblage of moments that followed the logic of affect. Affect theorists claim that, “feelings can speak for themselves” (Figlerowicz 3). In her introduction to *Affect Theory Dossier*, Marta Figlerowicz explains that affect theory has no single definition, but several branches, but in general is a study of “intensely personal

scholarship, as well as scholarship that tries to do away with personality altogether.” She writes:

Affect theory is grounded in movements or flashes of mental or somatic activity rather than causal narratives of their origins and end points. Brian Massumi calls this shift of perspective “fluidifying.” Teresa Brennan describes herself as focusing on the momentary “transmission of affect” rather than on the affective physiology of each particular person. Charles Altieri emphasizes that the “rapture” of each feeling you act on exceeds and reconstellates your prior sense of who you are or what you are driven by. It is in these movements or flash-like outbursts that affect theory finds its most robust notions of knowledge and subjecthood. It is also to these movements and to the philosophical implications of singling them out as objects of inquiry that it points as sources of its most persistent bafflement (Figlerowicz 4).

To collage moments discovered during the process, I apply my affective aesthetic, while considering the audience’s experience. As the director, I mediate the devised world made by the performers and the audience, in hopes of creating a communal event. After documenting the moments that captured my attention in reviewing the videos, I presented my findings to the group and we revisited moments, often adapting as we went, putting names to stage pictures and movements. I refer this to this phase of the process as sequencing. As moments emerged as chunks of material, we experimented with various sequences and the group created transitions between moments. The logic of this sequencing became apparent through collaboration, through group discussions that

solidified our collective affect. I attempted to not assert specific decisions, but rather facilitate and negotiate the emergence of this affect, allowing decisions about the work to be as communal as possible, so as to present a queer utopia of the performers' devising, not my own. I cannot argue that my experiences and privileges as a white, cisgendered man did not significantly affect the work, for certainly my identity as a gay man questioning queerness did. I proceeded with these concerns, which informed my creation of a space that encouraged queer presence to emerge. I pointed to the moments from the process that I identified as revealing utopian impulses, but the performers were responsible for deciding upon the final sequence, the performance text of the piece, under my direction, which we titled *PLAYBALLPLAY*.

Affect in PLAYBALLPLAY (2015)

A queer utopian aesthetic operates on affect. As Ernst Bloch indicates and Munoz reiterates, utopia is a concept that arises from feelings of hope. For Munoz, queerness, as a framework based on experiencing otherness, similarly operates on feelings, on feelings of shame and desire. Figlerowicz writes, "Some affect theory defends the therapeutic value of embracing unpleasant feelings such as shame, sadness, or loneliness. Its other branches highlight "ugly feelings" (to use Sianne Ngai's phrase) as sources not of self-knowledge but of social critique" (3). Queer utopia emerges from a discovery of hope in embracing ugly feelings, in taking control of systems of oppression and constructing new worlds that operate on devised structures, which allow for nonnormative expression and experience. As I encouraged my collaborators to construct their performative selves in the rehearsal room, I asked them to develop a queer self – a self that celebrates ugly

feelings – to guide choice making in a space purposefully separated from capitalist notions of what to do and how to behave. When these queer selves cohabit a stage, structures and systems emerge that not only allow for, but also celebrate queer subjectivity, asking audiences to reevaluate their makers of a successful performance and to engage with the material in act of devising their own queer self.

To elaborate on the experience of queerness that performers begin to cultivate in this process, for the queer, self-knowledge becomes social critique. For this discussion, I choose the pronoun “hir” to signal the gender play involved in the queer experience as I articulate it. The queer performs disjuncture within the heteropatriarchal society, paradoxically leaving hir longingly hopeful as an autonomous and political being. Edelman argues for the queer to celebrate herself as social outcast, valuing irony as a virtue and viewing suicide as potential freedom. Munoz views queerness as a mode of creation that can bring about collectivity in pursuit of performing realities not-yet-here that are palpable, but restrained in the here-and-now. Queer presence exists in spaces that subvert heteronormative order. I consciously cultivated queer presence in the rehearsal room and thereby in performance. The resulting work, as an encounter between performers and audience, exists as an event alive with queer presence, provoking an individual conceiving of the not-yet-here self, which could be if not for ugly feelings brought on by heteronormative society.

The sequencing phase of the process resulted in a score that included a blank canvas and two structured improvisations. Some editing decisions were necessary because we moved from a dance studio to a proscenium theater. I decided that part of the score would include the making of a film, as filming improvisations became a critical

part of the process. A live camera was on stage and performers shared the task of making sure one person filmed the others at all times. I, as director, made selections about music, as I had during the rehearsal process. I asked each performer to wear a dress of their choosing. I imposed these design choices as the mediator between the devised reality and the audience. I do not feel this choice compromised the presentation of multiplicity and collective authorship. I wanted to consciously frame the material to assure an audience could access what the performers created. The design choices subscribed to a queer utopian aesthetic, as defined by Munoz, of ornamentation and artifice, so the lighting was harsh and theatrical, a “Wet Floor” sign was repurposed as a sculpture, and the performers, male and female, wore dresses with black leggings. The scenic elements were agreed upon by the group and consisted of items that were incorporated into improvisations during rehearsals, including a red rubber ball, a chair, a shoe, a broken clock, and an item taken from an audience member. The lighting and projections were designed and executed by performers in the piece. Rachel Prestigiacomo, the lighting designer, ran back and forth from the booth to the stage and back again. I selected music by queer artists, including Anohni and Rufus Wainwright singing Judy Garland. To experience this aesthetic, see the production photos in the *PLAYBALLPLAY* section, starting on page 70.

Audience Experience in PLAYBALLPLAY (2015)

When audience members arrived at *PLAYBALLPLAY*, wearing a dress without black leggings, I welcomed them, saying, “Thank god you’re here. You’re encouraged to go on stage and you’re encouraged to have a good time.” The house lights already down

and a purple wash lighting the stage, the performers stretched and comingled with audience members brave enough to join them, as iconic gay music played loudly. When “Collect My Love” by the Knocks and Alex Newell began playing, the performers led those on stage in a group dance of simple, repeated moves. Then, during a free form dance break, the performer Emery Lawrence feigned spraining an ankle. I brought the house lights up and asked audience members to take their seat. I helped a limping Emery off the stage and told the performers to keep going. They began the score, which started with the task of attempting to say something, but the words get caught in their throats. Backstage, Emery begins the video recording before joining the fellow performers on stage. The score continues, ending with the performer Marcques Houston handing me the camera. I set up the projection technology, as the performers enact the piece’s epilogue. They smash a prop camera and dance to two Antony and the Johnson songs, “You Are My Sister” and “Dust and Water.” Then, a projection of the film just created appears on the back screen. The video begins with an introduction by Emery, saying, “You all thought I sprained my ankle, but we’re just getting started.” The video continuously speeds up, as the performers approach the screen. Eventually, the video moves so quickly that there are just flashes of color and body parts on screen and the music sounds like pulses of noise. It stops and there is silence and then, a blackout.

Each of Anne Bogart and Tina Landau’s viewpoints are at play, but those of time in particular are radically twisted when the film begins to play in fast motion on the back screen. The difference between the filmed and performing bodies becomes apparent as the performers approach the screen of flashing images slowly and deliberately. Subjectivity is rendered fluid and uncontrollable, as whatever each audience and

performer member experienced is transformed into a collage of noise and color that is gone too fast. Themes of visibility and technology, as well as gender, adolescence, and friendship emerged in a performance of young people in dresses filming themselves playing on stage.

“Where You and I ...” Composition

While directing the *PLAYBALLPLAY* process and researching queer, affect, and performance theory, I felt compelled to express an emerging sensibility in my own words. I revisited some poems I wrote in my notebook for EN 345: Modern American Fiction in the spring of 2015, as well as journaling from my time studying acting in Dublin, Ireland at the Gaiety School of Acting. My theoretical research in futurity allowed me read this poetry with new insights. I recognized a developing queer poetic voice, defiant of structure. This voice claimed felicitous authority, as it wandered through various thematic territories, offering self-knowledge as social critique. I decided to further the development of this voice. The act of writing allowed me to engage creatively with the queer theory.

“Where You and I Becoming And” also emerged from a fascination with the performative nature of the word, “you.” The voice truly began as a response to “Of Modern Poetry” by Wallace Stevens, which argues, “The poem of the mind in the act of finding/what will suffice ... must/Be the finding of a satisfaction, and may be/Of a man skating, of a woman dancing, a woman/Combing” (Stevens 219). The body of the poem mentions “an invisible audience,” which “listens/Not to the play, but to itself, expressed,/In an emotion as of two/Emotions becoming one” (219). Stevens’ call for the

modern poem to speak to an invisible audience and bring about performative action sparked my imagination. For me, the natural response to Steven's sentiment is a dramaturgical approach to poetry, to the manifestation of poetic language with performing bodies. Stevens claims that a poem speaks to each audience member differently, but ultimately compels introspection. The second-person tense, when spoken aloud, implicates the audience, but can also reference a self-reflecting speaker, or a specific receiver. I desired to blur these distinctions with my own poetry in hopes to arouse a queer presence, within which the identity of "you" remains undefined, available to bodies both live or fictional, male or female or neither.

The speaker of the poem, a "man on the verge of queerness," advocates and struggles through plurality, thus the title ends with a conjunction, a connection between the "you" and "I," which are in a process of identifying themselves and could in fact, be in the same person. The struggle, the dramatic tension, of the poem arises from speaker's formation of identity, while existing in a "where" dominated by the coercions of late capitalism. The collection is dedicated to capitalism, which will be "missed," because the speaker "likes pools." Water, in the poem, is a metaphor for queerness. A pool is a capitalist structure that allows for an exposure to queer pleasure, but one that is privileged and sanctioned. The dedication suggests that capitalism is dying and that the speaker exists in a reality not-yet-here in which its demise is so apparent that the system can easily be dismissed for having been at best, a producer of pools.

The poetry is dramatically structured, including a *dramatis personae*, specifications for scenography, and a playwright's note, which reads, "Before there were words, there were bodies. This is a dance somehow." This offering, which aligns with a

sentiment that occurs in the body of work, “words aren’t what’s happening,” suggests that the poem exists beyond the text, but also in its felicitous realization. If the poems suggest a narrative, the speaker “I,” if constant considering there are 35 poems, identifies as “gay” and contemplates the sociopolitical implications of this identity in conversation with those of a “queer identity.” It seems the speaker is being introspective, when saying, “You could have been somebody in both the loud and quiet (Oh, so quiet) and queer sense of the world.” The speaker establishes a dichotomy in which to be gay is to be in the world and participate in existing structures, and queerness is a brave foraging into a new society.

The speaker addresses his lover, who is referred to as “Baby,” though it is unclear if the receiver of this pet name is a single person, or an amalgamation of many. I deliberately chose “baby,” both because of its pervasive use in romantic relationships, but also to consider how reproductive futurity might be at play in affecting gay male relationships. Explicit sexual imagery that suggests male-on-male desire abound, as the speaker discovers queerness through an engagement in gay sex. I am responding to Edelman by claiming that if heteronormative relations serve reproductive futurity, then homosexual relations generatively serve a queer future that will rise from the fall of capitalism. The speaker considers queerness to numerous ends, considering pornography, as well as homonormative to transgender identities. In the poem, identity is performance, the context of which is constantly changing. Queerness is not a natural state, but a performed gender identity that allows for multiplicity and asserts the progressive politics of radical empathy, tolerance, and inclusivity, which are utopian values in the construction of a new society.

The voice wanders and discovers several texts, several of which are quoted directly, including Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the poetry of Mary Oliver and Walt Whitman, and Yvonne Rainer's "No Manifesto." The poem mentions several pop culture icons, such as Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston, and *American Idol* winner Kelly Clarkson, situating the work in a distinctly American metaphysical landscape. The work intentionally fluctuates between orienting and disorienting listeners, knowingly playing with capabilities of attention. Each poem was written in the tradition of action poetry, as an improvisatory act, though the collection was edited and revised later on, but not to forsake a stream-of-consciousness aesthetic. Thus, the collection, like *PLAYBALLPLAY*, is a collage of affective moments restaged, sequenced, and edited.

WHERE YOU AND I ... *Process*

As the poems became essential to the work of the overall project, I originally conceived of devising a solo performance, as another performer read the poetry aloud. I began developing a piece that felt far too masturbatory. "You" in the text meant those gathered at the event, the audience implicated in the poetry. I recalled the legacy of the Living Theatre and their goal of stirring action in the audience, as well as the sentiment of Wallace Stevens' poem. How could I get an audience to listen to themselves by hearing my poetry and become "a woman dancing," thus the poem itself (Stevens)? How could I present and not inflict a queer utopian aesthetic as a system of discovery onto unsuspecting bodies?

As I devised it, the audience experience of "WHERE YOU AND I BECOMING AND," the performance, started: You're in the lobby, lined up. One audience member is

allowed in at a time. You enter and I'm there in a paisley, floor-length collared dress with sparkles all over my eyes. It's a large, empty dark theater with spotlights on a red curtain. I welcome and lead you to the stage, saying, "Guess what? You're performing tonight!" Most people were taken aback, but I assure them that so is everyone else. You have a choice of what you'd like to do, while I read a 35-poem collection I've written. You can draw a picture, make a dance, or write your own poem. Once you choose, I pull back the curtain and you enter what's behind it. There's iconic gay music playing loudly, tables with coloring supplies and play-dough and games, a camera which is projecting a live feed of the stage on the back wall, a costume rack with clothes for dress-up, and a kiddie pool with a bit of water. Once everyone's gathered, I read the poems and everyone engages in their task as violin music plays in the background. When I finish the reading, I ask everyone to display and share their work as one. I go into the audience, film it, and suddenly, leave. The audience is left and told I'm not coming back and they should all go.

I knew that I needed to provide audience members an accessible way to engage. Inspired by Edelman's fixation on the child, I came to the idea of creating a space that would spark creativity in a familiar way for audiences, thus I created a quasi queer kindergarten classroom, in which teacher is having a subtle crisis, talking about gay sex, Walt Whitman, and Kim Kardashian. Welcoming each audience member individually, I hoped to establish a one-on-one relationship that remains throughout the performance, meant to bring about a kinship that combats a resistance to participate. By my example and encouraged to revert to the generative headspace of creativity, audience members could try on queerness as they create something new. At the end, I collage their work and film a moving image of this cohesive, if chaotic, world. The poems as a soundtrack are

meant to stimulate radical empathy with a “man on the verge of queerness.” This piece was very much created for the audience that attended: cisgendered. When developed further, I will consider how the structures I created can account for more nuanced understandings of queerness, as I too will develop my own relationship to the subject matter. The goal of the work was to include an audience as collaborators in the devising of a queer utopian world to initiate the utopian performative response of action. That world exists as ephemera, but dozens of drawings and poems remain as artifacts of its existence, as do videos of the act of creation, documentation of the founding moments of a spontaneous queer utopia.

PLAYBALLPLAY (2015)

Devised by Marques Houston, Nellie LaValle, Emery Lawrence, Brendan Leonard,

Thomas Lue, Lucy Soucek, and Rachel Prestigiacomo.

Performed by Marques Houston, Nellie LaValle, Emery Lawrence, Thomas Lue, Lucy

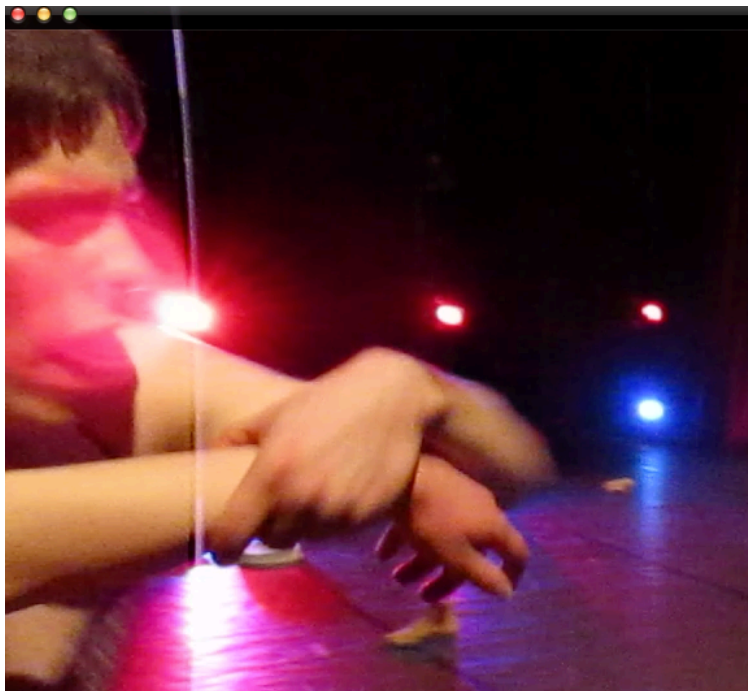
Soucek, and Rachel Prestigiacomo.

Directed by Brendan Leonard

Lighting Design by Rachel Prestigiacomo

Projection Design by Thomas Lue

Sound Design by Brendan Leonard



December 12, 2016 at 9 p.m.

Strider Theater/Runnals

Colby College

Waterville, Maine

The rehearsal process began with an open workshop:

DEVISING PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP 9.20.15

Thank you so much for participating in this workshop.

Name: _____

How you feeling? First reactions?

Which of these excite you (check all that apply):

Acting _____

Dancing _____

Painting _____

Photography _____

Film _____

Drawing _____

Poetry _____

Pottery _____

Handcraft _____

Public Speaking _____

Singing _____

Playing an instrument (List what you can play)

What else ? _____

Which of these scares you (check all that apply):

Acting _____

Dancing _____

Painting _____

Photography _____

Film _____

Drawing _____

Poetry _____

Pottery _____

Handcraft _____

Public Speaking _____

Singing _____

Playing an instrument _____

What else? _____

What will you remember about today next week?

How busy are you this fall? What are your major commitments?

Do you want to keep doing stuff like this? Why? (Totally skip if not interested)

Did anything concern you today?

What do you like to see on stage?

What don't you like to see on stage?

What have you always wanted to do on stage?

Favorite song/musical artist/band (Give me some new music to listen to)

Any additional feedback please

Workshop Photographs:

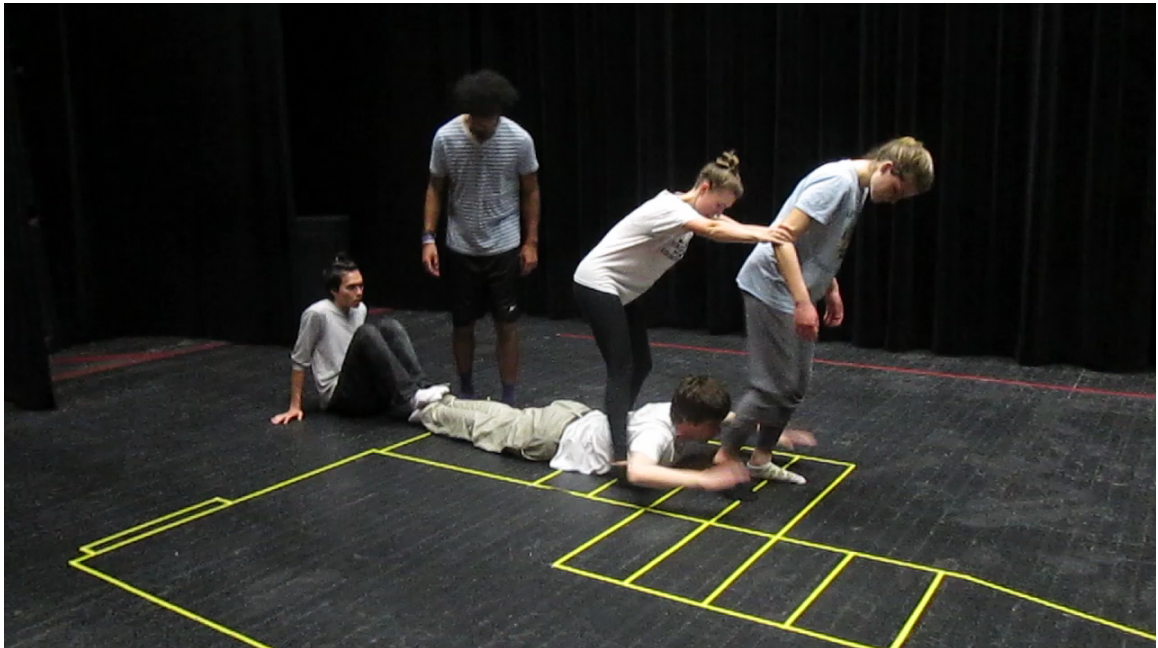




Rehearsal photographs and rehearsal footage:
(Also available at Digital Commons @ Colby)











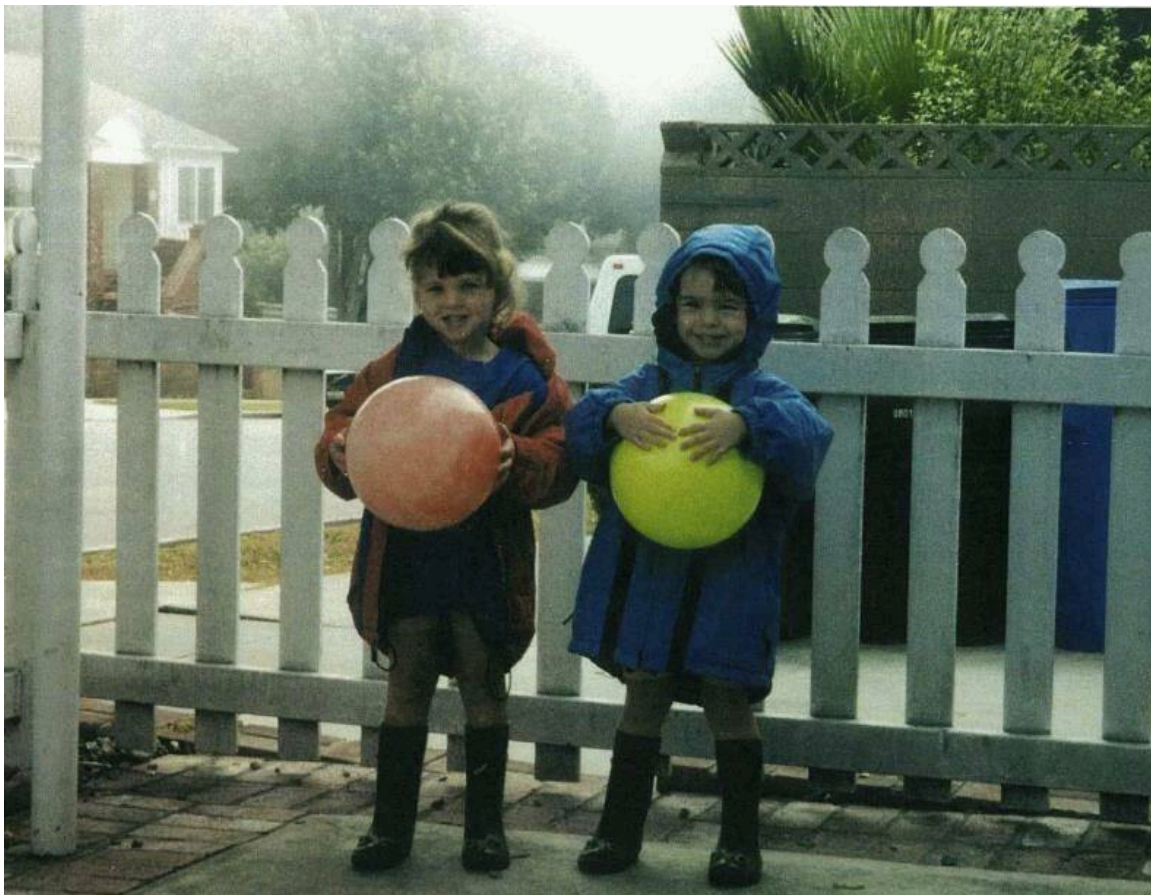


A flier advertising the performance:

PLAYBALLPLAY
SATURDAY, 12/12 @ 9 p.m.
STRIDER/RUNNALS

**By Marques Houston, Nellie LaValle, Emery Lawrence, Brendan Leonard,
Thomas Lue, Rachel Prestigiacomo, and Lucy Soucek**

An honors project by Brendan Leonard



COME SEE OUR/US DO ...
PLAY/FILM/DANCE/PARTY/GAME/POEM/RHYZOME/IMPROV
SHOW/WRESTLING
MATCH/QUEERPLAYGROUND/RUNWAY/LABORATORY/MONSTE
R'S LAIR/
BALL PIT/BALL/SPORT/PERFORMANCE/ART/EVENT/THINGlike
don't miss out lol.

Trailer:



Also available at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lb2QWqOVnAM>

PLAYBALLPLAY: the film, created during performance





PLAYBALLPLAY

A DEVISING PERFORMANCE BY MARQUES HOUSTON, NELLIE LAVALLÉ, EMERY LAWRENCE,
BRENDAN LEONARD, THOMAS LUE, RACHEL PRESTIGIACOMO, AND LUCY SOUCEK

AN HONORS PROJECT BY BRENDAN LEONARD
SATURDAY, 12/12 @ 9 P.M.
STRIDER THEATER/RUNNALS

COLBY COLLEGE

THEATER AND DANCE

PLAYBALLPLAY

A Workshop Showing of Honors Thesis Research
By Brendan Leonard

Description

Brendan Leonard will present a workshop performance of his in-progress Honors Thesis research in Strider Theater on Saturday, December 12th at 9:00p. He will serve as the primary contact during this process. This performance and process is a test of the Performance Research Workshop concept.

Production Team

Director/Stage Manager	Brendan Leonard
Light Design	Rachael Prestigiacomo
Projection Design	Thomas Lue

Schedule

Wednesday, December 9	5:00p to 6:30p 6:30p to 9:30p 9:30p to 11:00p	Rehearsal in Strider Theater <i>TD141-Playwriting in Strider Theater</i> Rehearsal in Strider Theater
Thursday, December 10	4:00p to 6:30p 6:30p to 10:00p	Rehearsal in Strider Theater <i>TD235: iAm Performance (no use of Strider Theater)</i>
Friday, December 11	4:00p to 6:30p 6:30p to 10:00p	Rehearsal in Strider Theater <i>TD235: iAm Performance (no use of Strider Theater)</i>
Saturday, December 12	12:00p to 8:00p 8:00p to 9:00p 9:00p to 10:00p 10:30p to 11:00p	Rehearsal in Strider Theater Call Time Performance Strike

Use of Strider Theater and Equipment

Brendan, Rachel, and Thomas are responsible for setting up all equipment and getting items from storage. Conversely, they are responsible for striking all equipment and putting items back in storage.

Safety is paramount in the Department of Theater and Dance. All department safety protocols must be followed and any questions pertaining to safety should be addressed to John Ervin or Jim Thurston.

The intent of the Performance Research Workshop is to explore a lean and intentional use of scenography in performance research. With this in mind, John Ervin, Chris Nilles, and Jim Thurston are available for advice but their time must be respected, especially during this very busy time in the semester.

Brendan will check in with John Ervin on Monday, December 14th to follow up on strike.

The following equipment is approved for use in PLAYBALLPLAY:

- Projection screen closed on stage as is.
- NEC projector in balcony position with lens as is.
- One chair from storage.

The Score

“Collect My Love”
Emery sprains ankle
Brendan stops music, audience to their seats, take Emery off
Group tries to say something, but can’t
Dead body pile
Find each other and make monster
Moves, finds Emery
He enters with camera
Find caution sign
Celebrate (There’s more!!)
Discover other objects
Place them just so
Then bodies
Music begins –
Black canvas
(Diamonds Made of Glass?)
Music ends
Body tour with peanut gallery
Up to ball – “What about you!?”
Improv making the ball’s story (Back in the Tall Grass?)
Thomas and Emery wrestle over ball
Girls back up
Go into phrase
Marques can’t think of what to say
“Happy”
“Sad”
“Angry”
“Dead”
Pause
Walk space – I see you seeing me
Find fail spot
School bell rings 10x
Improv – fail spot (Zing Went the Strings of My Heart?)
Record applause One person stops and stands –
All go to
Find wiggle
Move and discuss what is remembered
Improvise with goal of remembering what you’ve done (Dust and Water?)
Play video

All photographs by Casey Coulter.













Where You and I Becoming And

by b.f.x.l.

a man on the verge of queerness

to be read aloud by someone who isn't You

Dedicated to Capitalism.

I'll miss you.

I like pools.

Dramatis personae:

YOU
I
AND
BABY
SHE
THEM

Time: When read (aloud by someone who isn't You).

Setting: A performance space.

Costume: Genderqueer.

Properties: A pool, a violin, a napkin, a needle and thread, a rock, mirrors, cigarettes, feathers, wine, porn, books*, memorabilia, more.

Playwright's Note

Before there were words, there were bodies. This is a dance somehow.

*Suggested books for the performance space include *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, *Seeing is forgetting the name the thing one sees: A Life of Contemporary Artist Robert Irwin* by Lawrence Weschler, *Cruising Utopia: the Then and There of Queer Futurity* by Jose Esteban Munoz, *No Future* by Lee Edelman, *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler, printed copy of the "No Manifesto" by Yvonne Rainer, "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot, "Patriarchal Poetry" by Gertrude Stein, "Of Modern Poetry" by Wallace Stevens, celebrity autobiographies, and more.

ACT 1

-1.

Can You see
With me here?

0.

Oh –

1.

Feelings are rooms
We enter and stay in,
Get trapped in,
Or escape from.
We sleep in hallways –
Maybe.

Rooms are spaces,
Private spaces,
Open your doors,
And,
Let stars fly in space
To make reality,
(In public space, Baby, you see me)
Together in space,
Baby.
My baby.
You, baby.

Thank god there are still forbidden
Places
Left to explore
And I can hear from the hallway
And even porn knows what art is,
Art being the opening of new doors,
Baby.

2.

Baby,

Someone to smoke,
To defy,
And die with.

May you be sand,
So I may bottle
And pour
And count you,
Bit by bit
Until you're my stone,
If you please,
Baby boy.

You run funny
And you talk funny
And we're allowed each other
And we do not know what to do with that
Or each other,
Or do excuses make it easier
And –
And do you love me?
I'm doing this now and
Am I drunk and
Am I special and
Am I worthy and
Am I what's been going on and
Can I change and what –
Am I now
And what is small
In the big city
And I'll be there
In a year,
But that's "not really"
And I love you too,
But can that be
And is that real
When it's such a thing the world tells you –
Baby, baby, baby –
Oh –

I knew this was coming.

It's a now
I am choosing to feel –

To let in what's outside me,

So You can be and see
What's inside,
Baby.

What do you see
With me,
Here?

3.

I am dripping through
Slits of a dock
Into lake water,
Like oil,
Swirling technicolor
Among green algae
And reeds and bugs
And dissipating before the sand.

The sun presses
With a gentle
White hand.
I move between
Fingers and the
Little black hairs
On your knuckles.

You,
Who I wait for.

4.

I feel so full at the end of emptiness,
So that's good
Because soon I'll have done it all
And be what most people
Will remember,
Except nurses
And grandchildren
And those crucial
And a bit bullshit people
And it will be what I did then
When I wasn't supposed to yet realize
What is happening.

I forget about death,

Like I forget that I'm gay.
I know.
There are moments when I really know
Because I can't sleep
And my stomach is under the bed,
But life thankfully takes up space,
But then –

Will you figure this out for me,
So I can sleep in the hallway?
Will you be out there for me,
So I can spend forever in here –
Fucking and figuring out
What people mean to each other
When it's a lone and unmapped thing
To live, bitch.

5.

You get used to sitting on your wallet,
So your gay ass doesn't feel it anymore.

I swam in the lake
Before I swam in the pool,
But they're usually together,
Both are available
Because they like to put everything I like next to each other,
Like tabs

And you could have been somebody in both –
The loud
And quiet
(Oh, so quiet and queer) –
Senses of the world
To you,
Peace and pussytime solider –
Kiss your boyfriend,
Your baby boy,
Boy,
A boy,
A boy becoming a man
You come with And in And on,
Whatever that means
And be better
For him
Just like you always figured

And hold him to what you hold yourself to
As you hold him,
Baby.

6.

Well –
A grey gay hair grew today
Where my hair parts
So you can see it
Unless you don't want to think
About death in this little way
So you don't get inundated
With reminders that make
You carve out a brave life
For yourself – you
Covered in gay hairs
Soon to be carried away
In garbage bags

I am questions.
You are –

What does it mean
They see us now
We can be like them
We should like them
It would make it easier
If we all agreed
On the big things
And maybe we do
But the particulars –
The details that are
What life looks and feels
Like –
For me
It's You
Not anyone else,
But that's not the way it works.
You are changing,
Expanding,
Like me,
Like them,
Like where
We are.

Where You and I
Becoming And
Is here and
Here and
Over there.
If we walk
As one and –
Don't make
A sound
Because
That would betray
And
Like before,
When it wasn't
Now And
Wasn't
What will be
Because
We weren't becoming
When we became
What I am
Not And
And You
Who is always running
Away to over there
Where I don't know
What it is
Maybe,
Maybe,
Maybe,
Now,
Baby,
Baby,
Baby,
Baby –
What is it
When they're telling
You what it is
They, many they,
I am they
Because I'm not you
Because I am after you,
You define me,
So I am many
And maybe that's sad
Unless

You and I
Becoming And
Is they
I,
They,
Them,
My,
Me,
Baby.

Just look at me in a way
Someone else describes me
And you'll get it
And we'll be off
To something bringing me to You.

7.

Well, now I have to keep writing
Because the waiter asked me
If I was done with the pen on this napkin,
So I'll show him
That this is worth
The itch –

A SUPERSTAR
Is out of the room
In the hallway
Laughing,
Crying,
And You smell yourself,
Like the food in front of you.

8.

If I am subjected to this body
And these circumstances
And this praise
And this criticism,
Which wiggles me in
My directions –
What am I when I use my voice to tell
You what I am?

There's this mannish-looking woman in a
The wind dies down.

Hat with her father
Late at night in my own Barcelona and –
WILL WE EVER REALIZE PRIVATE MOMENTS?

9.

Everything is many things,
So don't keep the conversation short,
So let's treat with kindness
And learn how feelings take and
Toll –
Who is to mend
When the project is each other,
But the ways
We are about
Is not touched on?

"Touch me,"
She beckons.

So material and
Working with your hands is good
And something.
Making things,
Making parts sing together –
Sing quietly when they're kissing –
Each other –
Because lips on lips
In delicious
Coming together
And I don't know
If I want You to come on,
Or in me
Because maybe I'm enough
Things to keep track of –
But maybe you're part of me
And
I've always been enough
Or am I my story
Or is it ours,
And –
Don't speak,
Don't tell me
Because words aren't
What's happening.

10.

I am given away
By body parts.

11.

I want to collect
You, bit by bit
By body parts
First with my eyes,
Then by touch,
But never taking –
Collecting invisibly
But important and
Internally,
So you're inside me
Moving, churning, swirling
Within me,
Like liquid that
Pours out of my
Willing mouth –
Chapped lipped,
Acne scarred,
A me
Becoming You
A Me,
Yours baby,
You,
For now,
For right now.
For only right now,
Baby.

We don't say each other's names
Because they mean less than
What's been taking up space between our bodies –
Music –
We're already forgetting to listen to.

You and I,
Said it,
So it's over.
We're not
Becoming anymore.
We are

And we stay alive
Through back and forth
And promises and kisses
And can there be a
New way(s) to
Come –

Let's fuck and find out.

12.

Boy,
My bloody face
Is seen by you
And if you don't look away
I know you can stand
To see my seeping out
Interior,
Which falls in droplets
And must be washed
Off the floor –
Hardly seen puss and blood,
Little curls of
What disfigures
Me.

Cover me,
Forever,
For as far
As I am,
Including what's over there
And all.

Radically expand me
Without me looking
So I can be pleased,
While changing,
Growing
Ready –
But then
One isn't enough.

Wholeness has stains
And holes –
Patch it
With poking needle and thin, thin thread,

Baby –
Can you do that,
Baby?

Let's get something straight –
I am not You
And –

You are not me,
Whatever me is
And whoever that may be
Is neither
Here nor there
And,
Sure,
There is a place
When I might grow into,
As I expand,
As you can see.

Is that what you do,
And –
Are You waiting
For me,
Or
Am I eager
For a where
You and I
And,
Can at least
We
See each other –
At
A border
A body
A place,
Where it's ALL THERE,
Where here is over there,
While –
I expand
Toward,
While I swallow your world
All of it,
Wait there's more –
Shit.

I am rummaged
 After seeing You
 Over there,
 Here,
 Where I am becoming.

13.

I realize you're coming for me,
 I realize You are Me,
 But so is Baby,
 And so is me
 Whatever that is
 And me is a thing I'm keeping track of
 And so are You
 And you're not as big as the city
 Which isn't even here yet,
 It's coming like
 You do to me,
 Whatever that is
 Which can also be a when I get there
 And,
 Can I be young and growing
 And if that's done
 Why,
 What are we to do
 And whoever is When
 I applaud her
 Because she's always been my friend
 Because let's face it –
 It's been a good life
 And I am acknowledging that
 And you should probably read something else
 Because that's what we've always said
 He apologized forever
 And they started listening
 Because he spoke about what it was about
 Thanks,
 Culture,
 But really
 Why is this dedicated to Capitalism?
 Is what I ask
 And I know You were thinking it –
 So.

Oh –

14.

Why
Wouldn't it be
Nice to sit by the pool
And drink white wine
With a beefcake hovering above
On a tall, tall chair
Looking down
Past his massive, soft chest,
Which breaths
Not on top of me –

I hold your hand.
You smoke a cigarette (with the other)
Because it's a special occasion
And hasn't fantasy
Been a normal thing
Until now
When,
But it could be like this
All the time
And don't we want that,
But then
I'd be tempted.
Surely –

And the exchange
Is utter submission.
No,
Utter stasis in an
Idea of ourselves made young,
Though we might grow into something,
But we are bodies,
Wanting bodies,
That had the chance
To avoid the pool altogether
That maybe
Should still be
Fucking in swamps
Because that's where
You find dirty
New things
And that's what

Art, unsexy –
Cleaned-up later –
Art is –

New ideas,
Baby –
Porn can know
So let's film ourselves,
So we have proof,
So we can see
A new angle on a deeply felt thing,
A thing of
Wanting bodies
In the act of
Coming
Together –
Becoming each other,
But no,
It's not,
It's worlds
In some kind of crashing,
Clashing,
Noise.

Once we get there,
It's a dead,
A plucked thing –
So see the evidence,
Drink the wine,
Stand,
Run,
And jump
In the pool,
You,
Wet
Wanting
Thing,
Away from me –

Oh,
No, baby.

Oh,
But his lips
Him, or the other one
Oh,
I remember
This has been before,
But let it be the present one because the longer
You are there
The more this will be
Right
Because what have we,
But time to mean things
And making things into meaning takes time
And don't waste growing
Because by the end
You've arrived at something
And you're bound to be something
To be somebody who does something by the time
He gets out
So let's go to the city,
You and I,
And be what has already been
Times,
Over and over again,
And make a life because we're experts on ourselves,
And now each other,
Or we could do something different that that even –
But you feel good like a
Warm bath,
Like an old movie
And it could be like that –
Something we're good at
And bad at
At times,
But that's part of the story –
What makes it tense and rife with story
So it's told
And you want to be told
That you matter
At least to somebody
By somebody
A want of somebody
Not just a body,
But those are good too
And make me feel good,

Like I'm still capable of something
Big and new
And will that happen
Should I know what,
But your lips
And
You
What about You
Is that what this is too
Can it be
And if not,
Kiss me,
Singing,
Vibrate my insides with the noise of you
A racket inside me
Gently, Gently
Sighing,
Like violins.

Aren't they pretty?

16.

Wow.
If You only knew
What it actually meant
To be
With them.
Here,
You,
Oh,
You
Are there
Where I'm becoming
Whole and pure
Unlike this space
Where I am seen
By eyes that blink
Past their own
Tears and blood and puss
And see a thing, me,
That reminds them
Of their lack of control.

I can know you,
But I can't compel you

Faster to me
I have to tempt,
Flirt my way
Out of my body parts
A soul
Falling out the mouth
To be gathered
By painted fingers
Transformed,
Manicured
In the dance
Between the eyes
Those slowly blinking,
Crusted eyes,
But aren't I crusty too –
Shit –
And isn't that work?

You are they
Many or
You
You are many
Them inside you
Starting with the blood,
Then the voices in your head,
Then the past lovers,
Those who knew inside you
And those that play the puzzle of your mind,
I love them best
I thank them most
Because they could have
Stayed inside more often,
Or worse,
Played carelessly,
Recklessly,
And left me looking
For a You
That I'd have no way to
Recognize –
Oh –
Then the people that made you
Because their shared darkness
Is where it started
A world made.

And don't,

Don't I want that?
To share what becomes me when I sleep,
But can you handle a life
Of knowing what's behind my
Curtain,
Bitch?

So,
Now,
It's You
It had to be You
It was always You
I will always love You
I am becoming You
Who
Is
Was
And
Always
Were
Going
To
Be
World
Without
End,
Amen.

And –
And that's all you get,
Then You grow up
Into a becoming thing soon to be
Betrothed to a thing barely made,
But more so than
The somethings involved
And it's a thing that makes
You questions
You,
Curious,
You,
"Stay curious,"
She said,
As the
Wind dies down.

So –

So-
Oh-
Baby,
Baby,
Baby,
One more time.

End it on that note,
You,
Just play me
Like a
Stringed,
Many,
Neat
Stringed thing
And let it be music
That is inside me,
You,
Who I play for.

17.

How little can you hold on,
As you hold onto yourself?

How little can You be,
As you slip on by
Those that make you slip?

How beautiful and hardworking can you be,
Before someone realizes
And gives you a break
Before
You're broken.

How in the world
Of those
Did you emerge
To be telling me
I've been holding onto too much,
A boy
Hardly seen
Past what which
Is Big,
Not You,

Little,
Little,
You.

I have to start growing,
Or maybe I have to be transformed.

When are you drowning
And when are you holding onto your
Breath underwater for fun,
Or so you can make those screaming voices,
Whatever gentle noise you want to hear –

Baby-
Like a baby in the womb –
Like a thing yet to be –
Undocumented –

Is
That
What
The anxiety
Is about –
The existence of things
Unmarked,
Unknown,
Or rather
And –

Forming,
Growing,
Becoming –
Where You and I
Becoming
And,
And,
And,
And,
And –

They are scared.

ACT 2

18.

The strength we value
Is that of a solider
An empty thing
To be filled with what's necessary,
Which is far from
Less than
Bloody and unclean
Because it's what needs to be done –
“What's done cannot be undone”
It needs to be done
Because we like our way of
Moving about freely
So we can stretch
And reward the sun
We are grateful
And like pools
And worship that which makes us feel
Oh –
So good.

That's rights.
Curtain falls.
So –

19.

Maybe this is what's
Always been talked about
And now
Is about
Getting to talking,
Talking
Right now
And history is a process that
Is old with the old
And in with the new,
But in that
There's a tradition
And so,
Thus
We

Are
Paying
For our attention.

20.

Once they knew it was possible,
They started becoming
Said the seen man,
So he started playing the violin
A thing
He made sing in his own ear
And he let them hear
And by the end of
A piece called
“Song Of Myself”
He was someone else
As they were
And they,
Oh
They,
Were beside themselves.

21.

From playground to prison
Lines are drawn
And every line
Is a title
For You,
The someone who isn't You,
Because it's always been about You
And the song you're singing to yourself
Because at the end of the day,
It's You you're dying with,
Until
You realize
That it's human nature
The way things worked out
And does that even matter
When what really matters
Is the amount of times
You're interrupted from
The task of going into yourself
And listening to your song
And being the Superstar that got seen and heard
And held onto as much

And

And

And

And

And

As little as possible

And gave a megaphone to their

Little,

Little

Self.

22.

I value simplicity

With a megaphone.

23.

That's what you should be doing,

But are you just being docile –

We're all being docile

And none of us are the cool kids –

Who actually don't give a fuck,

Because they aren't humans

They're –

They're-

Not here yet.

We're waiting for an alien invasion,

But wasn't that the dream

Of these times

That became like the past

And wasn't it called

“War of the Worlds”

And isn't that a scary

Thought

You have

Again,

And

Again,

And,

Again.

Baby,

Baby,

Baby,

Oh.

24.

The boys of war
Were everybody
The boys of war
Are everybody
You,
Even You,
So let us all in
Because the help is needed,
Called for,
In the middle of the night
When You least expect it
They'll need even You
To convince us
That
"The Times They Are-a-Changing"
Because it's a nice thing
To remember,
Like pools,
Like the recent past,
Which is everything up
Until now
That made you
Who
You
Are,
Were,
Been,
Being –

25.

Our art
Is advertisement,
An advent
Of war,
Baby,
Because we need
An emptiness that
Is full of fury,
Ready
For blood.

26.

I'd rather be out here
Than in there
With space
To carve
With body parts,
But that's the problem,
So make them the solution
Even though
It's not ideal
To be in this world
Where we were cursed
With the ability
To know
Better
And oh,
There's no going back.

27.

You don't want
To need them,
But it's what I think about
All the time.

28.

The word
"Fucking,"
Which is an important
Word,
"Words, words, words"
Expresses a kind of –
Sexual anger –
It's like hurt that comes
From private parts
That ache and are
Sore,
Beaten,
Timid,
Scatterbrained,
And move backward
On insect legs.

I remember

When I was
On a lake,
On a dock
At night
With,
But
My shaking body
In the face of darkness
With a You,
Another You,
Because there is –
There is
Another You
And maybe this is an exploration in subtext,
Which is something personally made,
Like the macaroni necklace on the Mona Lisa,
Which lets everybody know
This guy cut his ear off –
“Leave your mark without leaving your mark,”
She said
And so She took pictures of herself
And laid next to me on the dock,
Shaking from swimming,
The sound of the peepers
Roared quiet,
So we can make that gentle noise
Sound
Like
Fucking
Violins.

Baby?
Oh –

Falling in love
Is a drowning,
But doesn't it feel like
Holding your breath for fun,
Which is a sick game we do anyway
Because it's big and time is so big,
A big thing barely made
Before it's over
So hold on to as much and as little as possible
As it comes on and in you,
Garbage man.

29.

But the talent
Is to make it
Otherwordly
Because
It was never
Going to be this
World
That just let you be.

A
Quiet,
Quiet,
Voice
In
The
Dark
Because
It's the beyond
And isn't that sad
And scary –
Isn't the future
Moving so fast these days –
They say,
Or it is because
This has always been the speed of time
And didn't it go by ever so slow before
And they weren't scared
They were listening to jazz
And swaying
And –
And treat people the way you want to be treated.

“All I ask
Is the chance
To make new worlds
And God
Has always given us that.”

Notice how I broke
That
Because
It belongs to me
And
The thorn in my side

Is that Thornton Wilder's name is
Not Thorton Wilder
Because that always sounded like more of name
To me.
What do
You think?

30.

Are you getting defensive,
A boy who played defense
On all the sports teams
And
Didn't that mean you were
Destined to bottom and like
It ever so much,
You
Little
Queer
You
And
"I believe that children are
Our future
Treat them well
And let
Them
Lead the way,"
Said Mariah Carey,
While smashing
Snow globes
In a ballgown
This Demember
And all the ever
Decembers
And
Doesn't Kelly deserve a December too?

Beat.

Are you getting defensive?
Defense!
Defense!
Defense!

31.

She is something else,
So
She is something to you
And
She can move when you let her
And
She can be if you let her be
And she was always there,
She was always something else
Too
And You knew that,
Didn't you?

32.

What if it's just a fetish
And what is the difference between
Love and sex and gender
And isn't it about getting what you want,
But isn't that pleasure
And isn't it the coming together
Of two different things,
The explosion of many things,
All those things that aren't You
Colliding and becoming and coming
And isn't,
Hasn't this always been porn,
Smut,
The shit you weren't supposed to figure out
Because it's easier to think here
Than over there
And isn't it a game to solve yourself
And what are they keeping from you,
Or is it what You are keeping from You
Because You know it's all out there
For the taking,
But the taking
Will leave you
Oh,
So lonely,
And isn't it about You
Because Without You
I Am Nothing,
Nothing,
Nothing,
Nothing,

If I don't have you,
So you're too bright and
You do coke
And you crack
Like a cartoon joke,
But then again,
Crack is whack and
Crack is cheap
And "I do not smoke crack,"
She said
And when she said and not sang,
They got upset.

Anyway,
What if you are allowed yourself,
The room of your own,
The space away,
Where you can be without
The corruptive forces,
And isn't that on the stage,
Here,
Where You can exist
Without saying exactly what it is You are
Because to say so
Would mean you were
Forgetting the name
Of the thing one sees.

And that's what it is
And it's smart
And it's not that smart.

It's what should be,
Futurity,
Name it,
Like me,
Name it,
Forget it,
And
Let things be,
Me
Who is a thing
You can call me,
But I'll be others
You are others to me
When you're in front of me

And it's just the words I say
 And it's just the things I do
 You will remember about me
 Because it's not the who
 It's the what,
 The feeling,
 That plays you like a violin
 Because feelings are
 Because rooms are spaces
 Of your own
 This is a room of our own,
 Yet she said,
 "NO to spectacle.
 No to virtuosity.
 No to transformations and magic and make-believe.
 No to the glamour and transcendancy of the star image.
 No to the heroic.
 No to the anti-heroic.
 No to trash imagery.
 No to involvement of performer or spectator,
 No to style.
 No to camp.
 No to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer.
 No to eccentricity.
 No to moving or being moved."

No.

Because –

But,
 But I like some of those things
 And that's an old way of thinking
 And make yourself the way you like,
 Instead of an empty thing,
 Because let's face it,
 Now
 We like screens and they make it easier,
 So easy,
 I'm sorry easy
 And is nature a thing to kiss
 Or kiss on,
 But aren't we animals
 And must you let "the soft animal of your body
 Love what it loves?"

But what's the difference?
The animal and You –

What's in between me and You?

I've been in the pool so long
That my fingers are permanently shriveled.

33.

Well,
Just be the first
And you're set.

I'm scared.

It's where it happens
Is the thing,
Where there's many
People,
Like the city, Baby,
There are many
Things,
Including the scary things
That stopped becoming real
When the horizon
Broke like
A joke
Like a soft, comforting,
"Don't worry about that"
And
Nightmares
Nightmares
Nightmares.

Applause and it's over.
Applause and it's over.
Applause and it's over,
Whitney.
Christmas is an American thing
And didn't it all start with Christmas.

Can't we all live our fantasy
And isn't she fantastical?

Can't we all have a feather
And take turns
Clap,
Clap,
Clapping
For each other and let each be the
Followed
And aren't we doing that a little, little bit
Like,
By like,
And we create our gallery
And offer free admission,
And you can even
Graffiti me,
But I get clean, clean
Erasure of You
When I don't need to see
What it is you think and feel,
But you were never going to let that leave draft
Were you?
And does it have to be said
To ruin everything,
Or does talking make it easier or harder to know
And understand
The quiet noise of my
Bleeding guts?

It still costs money
To live it,
Bitch.

So
Pass as rich.
They're passing as rich
And they get to do whatever they want
So they have a show about themselves
Wouldn't it be nice
If that's all it was
To figure out yourself-
Kim,
And make reality
From dreams,
But wouldn't it be nice
If they thought about that?
And wouldn't it be something to fill your head

With the noise of the breath of your body?

Wait,

Just listen

With a little,

Little touch,

Gentle now.

Smell is the next frontier.

34.

And stay a monstrous,

Manied thing,

Baby,

All of it

And what's not there.

What if they grow,

Baby,

They,

Baby

Grow

And hold hands with a self

Dreamed so small,

She is a muse,

Like tinkerbelle

And she cloaks herself in stars

Flying away

From tiny hands

Who want to fly

Out of windows

Out of doors

In space

This space

Where the muse is You,

Baby,

Where I becoming You

And You fit like reality,

Inevitable,

Overwhelming,

And seen differently by

Every and each

Feeling,

Which can

Pinch,

Prod,

And fist the body
And don't they pour out the mouth
In sight of something like that,
Like You,
Baby,
But
Baby,
It isn't that easy.

It's them too.

35.

Ok,
Ok,
It's getting away from us
Now.

What is it we're saying needs to touch water
Needs to be formed enough to look and feel
Like enough of something that You
Felt in some room you've forgotten
And when you enter this space
You are in the space of your own choosing –
Be there now
Sit and think in it
Even though you never had time to do that
Because that's the room you do nothing in
And You don't remember nothing.

This is a space to sicken yourself too,
Motion sickness,
I'm telling you
To go where you don't belong,
But need to go
Because even though it's over there
It's here too,
Or can be –
It's that or this
You or I,
Which is becoming closer to the other
And you can resist,
But aren't we all coming to settled,
Peaceful end,
But

No,
No,
No,
Hit me baby,
One more time,
Wake me up,
Because who is telling me
These things I know
And what escapes all
What is settled in our bones even after they're washed
What gets buried that we never managed to make out
What does the garbage man notice about you
That they never knew –

Where
And when is
The time spent
Doing the thing that you're getting ready for –
"Sit still,"
She told the baby,
Who is coming up next on –
Wait,
You learned how to turn things off,
So,
So
Just do nothing,
But that's bone scary,
In the ground,
Bones scary,
Baby,
Baby,
Kiss me.

I can say this
And keep going.

If you don't want me to,
I can tell jokes,
Which will be broken,
But when we're broken
We tell jokes –

Pleasure,
I'm telling you
Is the thing to find by –

The wind dies down,
Fooling yourself into thinking
It isn't the only thing
You're looking out for.

So we
Break
And
Are a stained,
Whole many things,
Including your
Fat
Fucking
Fantasy,
So big,
It contains it all
And we live in a becoming.

Be nice
Because you had this space
And you made little worlds
In the sands of other planets,
In the dark,
On a lake,
On a dock
And yes,
There was someone on the other side of you
Beside yourself
Cracking jokes
As you cackled
And you don't see them,
But you hear the noise inside you
As they play
You,
Stringed,
Badly drawn,
Out of tune
You
And they played you
When they could have
Played for and with
And in and on
Other people
And so yes,
There is water,
Life on other planets,

And they too have pleasure,
In the bones
Pleasure
And it's the time
We've spent together
That is something
And in this time
Where You and I Becoming And
It's about
Me
And
She
And
You
And
Them
And
A taking care of each other,
And a letting
Baby,
Be
You,
You,
You,
You,
You,
You,
You,
You,
You,
You,
You.
You.

The wind dies down.

Pause.

End.

WHERE YOU AND I BECOMING AND (2016)

Preview

Devised and performed by Nellie LaValle, Brendan Leonard, and Lucy Soucek

Written and directed by Brendan Leonard

Produced by Cookie Harrist and Delaney McDonough

presented as part of the Bates and Colby Showcase

March 5, 2016 at 7:30

Denmark Arts Center

Denmark, Maine

Premiere

Devised and performed by Brendan Leonard with the audience

Written and directed by Brendan Leonard

Lighting Design by Rachel Prestigiacomo

Projection Design by Thomas Lue

Sound score performed by Sarah Cunningham

April 29-30, 2016

Strider Theater/Runnals

Colby College

Waterville, Maine



Preview photographs:

Photograph by Sara Gibbons



Denmark Arts Center

Photograph by Cookie Harrist



Denmark Arts Center

Premiere Photographs:

All photographs by Casey Coulter.

















Premiere videos:



Recorded by Brendan Leonard on April 29th, 2016 in performance



Recorded by Brendan Leonard on April 30th, 2016 in performance

Conclusion

Before we go.

In chapter 1, I remembered a history of artists making work that reflect utopia, not reality, which I call devising. This requires imagination, collaboration, and hope and won't make you much money. In chapter 2, I weighed two different queer theorists take on what the future holds and I chose to believe in the idea that there might be a future for me, if I devise it. In chapter 3, I got started and invited others along with me. This project is an argument that its time to devise theater and start preparing for the future because it's coming faster than we're ready for. If you pay attention in the right places, you'll see it coming. This project is about letting go and realizing things could be different and going on.

This project hasn't been an easy one. I learned about the systems that keep the essence of what I'm trying to get at from me. I realized that I am complicit those systems.

I am capable of ignorance, intolerance, and the violence that I like to think I'm on the right side of.

For me queerness, as I explore it in my performance art, is available to all of us, as a way of thinking, as an approach to our selves.

If we let ourselves go, the definitions and limitations we set for ourselves –

If we let them dissipate in favor of daring to claim we don't know who we are and what things mean –

We might see something new.

I don't know if I'm a man, or a woman, or good, or bad–

If we take this queer approach, we might find new ways to connect to one another, something bringing me to you in a meeting of discovery. Thank you.

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