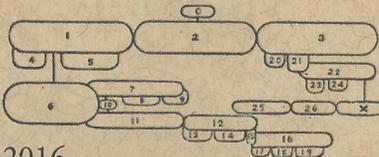


What Remains Of Personal Discussant

by Ira S. Murfin



2016
A Present Tense Pamphlet

Personal Discussant (2013) was a performance response to the graduate student conference *In Bodies We Trust: Performance, Affect, & Political Economy* hosted by the Department of Performance Studies at Northwestern University.

At this conference, guest discussants – mostly faculty from Northwestern and other institutions – were tasked with formally responding to graduate student panels. Imagining a “discussant” tasked with managing the genres of informal discussion – scholarly and otherwise – that typify the interstitial downtime which accounts for most conference-going experiences, I designated myself a “personal discussant” for anyone looking for a more structured way to engage in freeform discussion on breaks.

I attended all conference sessions, taking notes on things I heard, thought, and observed, then rushed back to my designated room, where I copied these notes by hand, one at a time, onto individual index cards. Starting with the standard small talk that begins most conference conversations, and growing more specific over the course of the day, the cards reflected an informal archive of the thoughts, ideas, questions, and occurrences generated by and circulating within the conference.

I laid the cards out in an ever growing and shifting grid on a large table, where anyone who chose to visit during the breaks could see them. Visitors could use the cards as a starting point for discussion, and if they wanted they could add their own.

I was pretty lonely for most of the day. Apparently most people would prefer to manage their informal, interpersonal conference discussions on their own. Though those that did visit found a robust selection of starting points for conversation, and we were never at a loss for words.

While the index cards initially functioned as transient objects that served to facilitate discussion connected to a shared experience, once removed from that context they became an idiosyncratic archive of the words and thoughts around which that experience was shaped.

Two years later, in *Reconstructing Personal Discussant* (2015), I returned this archive to its original site. Presented to the side of *Is This Performance? A Performance Studies Happening*, an evening of performances inspired by 1960s Happenings hosted by the Department of Performance Studies at Northwestern University, *Reconstructing Personal Discussant* looked almost identical to *Personal Discussant* – I sat at the same table with the same cards laid out in the same grid, and waited for visitors.

As in 2013, the cards proved productive sources of conversation as audience members trickled in before the performances began. This time, the cards were enigmatic starting places for discussion, less immediately referential but more available to move in more directions.

My presence allowed me to provide context and to connect the cards' history to the site of the performance. Though when most of the audience crowded into the room at intermission, the dynamic shifted – the cards became less important and my presence became more so. A Q & A format took over and I was asked to explain and defend the words on individual cards, in effect to reconstruct not only *Personal Discussant* but also its context.

What Remains of Personal Discussant completes the triptych by offering the archive generated by *Personal Discussant* and deployed in *Reconstructing Personal Discussant*, now free of its temporal and spatial context, and of my presence to manage the discussion or explain the cards.

Arrayed here in random order, they can no longer shift or be shuffled (though I can envision some intrepid interpreter cutting them out and rearranging them,) but they present the possibility of generating future discussion, both far removed from and forever tied to a graduate student conference at Northwestern University on October 12th, 2013.

I remain present most through my idiosyncratic and often borderline illegible handwriting (and in relief by the occasional respite provided by a few contributions in other's script); as the reducing valve through which most of these 110 quotes, thoughts, and observations passed in order to be selected from amongst everything that happened that day to be preserved on these cards; and in the chance order in which I shuffled and dealt the cards for this final display.

(On this last point, I am anxious and embarrassed to note that the very first card here conveys a sentiment I do not agree with, would never express, and cannot imagine that anyone at the conference espoused. I no longer remember the original context, of course, but my best guess is that it was a presenter characterizing an opinion with which they disagreed, which I wrote down without explanation. Or perhaps it was originally a somewhat more elegantly phrased assertion making a more politically palatable point about strategies of resistance to neighborhood redevelopment by poor residents of *already* healthy neighborhoods. In any case, here it remains. Perhaps it can be the first item up for discussion.)

Finally, the three versions of *Personal Discussant* are held together by the institutional context of Northwestern University. It is in the nature of performance that the first two iterations will always and only exist at and in relationship to Northwestern, while the nature of publishing allows this pamphlet to begin at Northwestern and potentially find itself realized in a discussion far removed from its institutional origins.

Autobiographically, this comes at a moment when I am imagining leaving this institutional context relatively soon myself, as my graduate career draws to a close.

Discuss.

Ira S. Murfin
Evanston
2016

THE ATTITUDE + BEHAVIOR OF POOR PEOPLE
PREVENT THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTHY
NEIGHBORHOODS.

WHAT WE'RE REALLY TALKING ABOUT
IS GLOBAL NEO-LIBERAL
ECONOMIC MARKET CAPACITY.

IF THE CONFISCATION OF PRIVATE BANK
ACCOUNTS CAN HAPPEN, THEN ANYTHING
CAN HAPPEN.

It occurs to me that a lot
of programming that was once housed
& produced in settlement houses is
now sponsored by the Chicago
Park District.

'A TENDENCY TO OVERTHINK THE MOVES.'

EMOTIONS CONSTITUTE THE SOCIAL.

WHAT CONSTITUTES PARTICIPATION?
CAN WE OPEN IT TO ACTION?

IRISHNESS IS A VOLUNTARY IDENTIFICATION
OF WHITE ETHNICITY, HOW DOES IT ALLOW
WHITE 'WORKING CLASS' AMERICANS TO
CLAIM BOTH POWER + THE MARGINS?

PEOPLE CAN ACTUALLY KICK OUT
PRESIDENTS.

ARE YOU GOING TO LUNCH/DINNER?

FAILURE DISMANTLES THE
LOGIC OF SUCCESS

RECOGNIZABLE REFERENTIALS.

THE SOUTH BRONX HAS BEEN IN
A RECESSION FOR 30 YEARS.

DO MEDIA GENRES (IN THEIR AFTERLIFE
BEYOND TECHNOLOGY) ENABLE EMBODIED
(CHOREOGRAPHIES TO BORROW THE
TERMS + FRAME OF FILM
PERCEPTION, TWITTER ACTION, ETC.?

THE LATEX SCREEN IS BOTH
CONNECTOR + OBSCURANT.

AN AMBIENT INFORMATION SHARING
ENVIRONMENT.

WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THAT
PANEL?

~~WHAT~~ What are the
affective economies of
the university? Do they
accrue debt? How can you
pay that off?

UNLITERARY KNOWS TEND TO
EMERGE IN HIGHLY CONCENTRATED
URBAN AREAS.

OUR INVESTMENT IN THE LITERARY, PROGRESSIVE
MOVEMENT OF TIME.

NOT NECESSARILY DETROIT.

WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG SOMETHING
FAR MORE RIGHT + REVOLUTIONARY HAS
OFTEN OCCURRED.

- FUNK IS A PHILOSOPHY, A SPATIAL EXPERIENCE,
A PERFORMANCE.
- CHARISMA IS EMOTIONAL AROUSAL.
- FUNK IS THE MEDIUM TO TRANSFER
CHARISMA TO THE AUDIENCE.

AFFECT IS MOBILIZATION.

IF YOU CAN FIND PEACE IT DOESN'T
MATTER IF YOU'RE GAY.

FOR THE SOMATIC + COGNITIVE OBSERVATION
OF DANCE:

- EXPERIENCE
- UNDERSTAND
- REFLECT
- DISCUSS

PROJECTION AS AESTHETIC.

INVESTMENT IN NON-PRODUCTIVE LABOR
+ OBSESSIVE MOVEMENT IN PERFORMANCE
ART.

HUMAN PRESENCE IMPERCEPTIBLE.

INTERACTIONS THROUGH BARS GENERATE
RELATIONALITY WITHOUT THE NECESSITY
OF TRUST.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE HARRIS / THE BLOCK /
ANNIE MAE SWIFT / UNIVERSITY HALL IS?

FUNK MIXED PLEASURES, PERFORMANCE
+ INTELLECTUALITY.

disruption of the
academic body

WHAT ABOUT MYTHOLOGICAL DEFORMATION?

CAN AN INSTITUTION ADEQUATELY,
ACCURATELY, + LEGITIMATELY REPRESENT
HIP-HOP'S CONCERNS, OR IS IT ALWAYS
TIED TO URBAN GEOGRAPHIES?

A GENEALOGY OF JAGGED
TENSIONS.

'DRESS CLASSY, DANCE CHEESY.'

THE REVOLUTION HAS MADE THE BEST
POSSIBLE USES OF THE INTIMATE
ASPECTS OF TWITTER.

WHEN ARE YOU PRESENTING?

WHY WOULD YOU HAVE A PARADE?
YOU ONLY HAVE A PARADE IF SOMEONE
IS DYING.

QUEER IDENTITIES DISSOLVE
THEIR POLITICAL POTENTIAL AS
THEY ARE INCORPORATED INTO
PROCESSES OF MASS PRODUCTION.

WHAT MAKES MONEY VISIBL?

ARE THERE TROUBLE MOMENTS IN
THE CHARMATIC PERFORMANCE OF
FUNK THAT RECALL BLACK ENSLAVEMENT
+ RESISTANCE?

PERFORMANCE, FAILURE, DEFICIENCY
VS.
ACHIEVEMENT, PROCESS, ACQUISITION

"THIS IS HOW IT LOOKED EVERY DAY"
PLACE AS MEMORIAL OF ITSELF.
ANGER THAT "IMPROVEMENT" ROBS THE PAST
OF ITS TRUTH.

THE CURATORIAL COMMON.

FUNK COMES FROM AN AFRICAN WORD
FOR STRONG BODY ODOR THAT HAS
A POSITIVE ASSOCIATION WITH
HARD WORK.

IT'S NOT A FASHION IN THE
FIRST PLACE, IT'S A FEELING.

TURING VIDEOS.
(SITE SPECIFIC MEMORIAL DANCE.)

SELF-COMPOSITION BY PROPRIETORSHIP.

GHOSTS OF MINORITARIAN SUBJECTS
SPECTACULARLY HAUNTING
THE STAGE.

MID-LATE 20TH C. AVANT-GARDE AESTHETIC:
BODIES IN ROOMS SPREADING SHARED
EXPERIENCE.
(PRE-SOCIAL MEDIA.)

HOW DO BODIES FEEL?

VS.

WHAT ARE THE FEELINGS
OF THESE PARTICULAR BODIES?

"HAVING A RECORDER IS LIKE HAVING
A LOADED GUN IN THE FIELD."

"THAT'S A METAPHOR."

PEDAGOGUES OF EVERYDAY LIFE
BECOME MICRO-LEVEL MOMENTS
OF PRESERVATION.

THE ARCHIVAL EXPERIENCE
IS ITSELF EMBODIED.

WHAT DO YOU WORK ON?

THE AMATEUR / PROFESSIONAL BINARY

UNDER WHAT SYSTEM DOES (HIP-HOP)
BECOME A CULTURE IN NEED
OF PRESERVATION?

- SPACE
- AESTHETIC/AFFECT
- COMMUNICATION, TECHNOLOGIES,
+ NETWORKS
- REGIONAL EXCHANGE
- ASSEMBLAGE

PARALLEL INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF
HIP-HOP + PERFORMANCE ART.

PROFESSIONAL, LEISURE, SELF-IMPROVEMENT
+ FITNESS: WHAT ABOUT THE
ART CONTEXT?

WAGE LABORERS ALWAYS SELL
THEIR BODIES.

BUNDEN IS CATEGORIZED AS A
CONCEPTUAL + PERFORMANCE ARTIST,
NEUTRAL IN TERMS OF IDENTITY
PERFORMANCE. ALSO IS ALWAYS
IDENTITY ART.

THE REPERTOIRE OF AFFECS IS
NON-REPRESENTATIONAL, RATHER
IT IS SENSORY.

FEELINGS (PLURAL) = EMOTION
FEELING (SINGULAR) = EXCITABLE ORIENTATION
TO AN ENCOUNTER.

IT'S KIND OF LIKE CHRISTMAS
WITHOUT THE PRESENTS, BUT THEN
A WHOLE LOT MORE BEER.

SOLO FLASH MOB.

THE BODY IS ALREADY ALMOST
ALWAYS WHAT IT WILL BECOME IN
THE FUTURE.

WHICH PANEL DID YOU GO/
ARE YOU GOING TO?

THE HOSTAGE IS ALWAYS ALREADY
RACIALLY PROFITED.

ONE MAY FEEL REALLY LOCKED OUT
INTO THE STREETS.

ARE YOU HAVING A GOOD CONFERENCE
SO FAR?

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

DID NOT ILLUMINATE STRUCTURAL
RACISM.

RUINS ECONOMY.

HOSTAGE ACT.

RAPID + INFECTIONS SPREADS OF
QUIBBLINESS ACROSS THE GLOBE.

HOW DOES BODILY PROXIMITY
ALLOW US TO GAIN ACCESS TO
THE PAST?

DOES THIS GENERATE CONNECTIVITY, EVEN
A TENSE OR UNTENSE ONE RATHER
THAN ABSOLUTE ALIENITY?

FLOATING, OR TRAPPED BY
THE MEMBRANE?

THE LIGHTS HAVE A COLD, MONOTONE
FEEL, THOUGH THERE IS SOMETHING
ORGANIC. (THEY LOOK TO ME LIKE
THEY ARE SIGNALLING FOR HELP IN
AN EMERGENCY.)

I WANT A HUGE SPEED BUMP AROUND
STEPPING OVER POLES ON THE SIDEWALK.

I'M GOING TO MISREAD THE
PAPER VIOLENTLY.

CENTRALIZE THE FAILURE
OF PARTICULAR
DESIGNS.

THE AUDIENCE IS THE PARADE.

IRISHNESS CIRCULATES BODY TO BODY
REGARDLESS OF CLASS, RACE, PAUSE
OR BACKGROUND.

HOW CAN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY
PROVIDE AN ALTERNATIVE
TO INSTITUTIONALIZATION?

HOW IS PARTICIPATION GENERATED?
FOR EVERY ALAN KAPROW THERE
IS A YOKO ONO.

URBAN SPACE FEELS DANGEROUS AS
A PRODUCT OF INSECURITY DISCOURSE.

WE RECOGNIZE STRUCTURAL
CHANGE WHEN SOMETHING
FEELS DIFFERENT.

EMPHASIZING A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
TWO URBAN POPULATIONS WHO RARELY
INTERACT DESPITE THEIR PROXIMITY -
PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENTS + ART STUDENTS.

LIVE PERFORMANCE YIELDS
AESTHETIC MATERIAL -
BODIES ARE BOTH LABOR +
LABOR'S PRODUCT.

THE TRANSNATIONAL IS NOT ALWAYS
A RADICAL PRACTICE.

CHARISMATIC SPEAKERS:

1. SPEECH IS SIMPLE IN TONE.
2. SPEAKER USES HIGH ACTION VERBS
3. SHARP IDENTITY = COLLECTIVE ACTION
4. RAPID DELIVERY = SELF-CONFIDENCE
5. USE OF REPETITION + CALL + RESPONSE.

DOES CURRENT SOCIAL MEDIA
ENVIRONMENT IN SOME WAY FLATTEN
OR DIMINISH THE PARTICULARITY
OF DIFFERENT EVENTS?

PARTICIPATORY PERFORMANCE IS PERFORMANCE
IN WHICH PEOPLE CONSTITUTE THE
CENTRAL ARTISTIC MEDIUM.

THE AESTHETICS OF COOPERATION.

IF CODES OF QUEERNESS DO NOT READ
IN THE EVENT, HOW DOES MEDIALIZATION
FRAME THESE PERFORMANCES AS LEGIBLE
& ALLOW THEM TO SIGNIFY?

BY EQUATING A PERSON WITH THEIR
PAST INNOVATIONS DO WE ROB THEM
OF A PRESENT?

'BANGING OUT THE MARIJUANA LIKE A G.'

QUEER IDENTITY IS FACILITATED BY
WEALTH IN CONTEMPORARY VIETNAM.

Dialogue

KAPROW LANDED THE DIFFICULTY IN
BRINGING THE AUDIENCE INTO THE HEART
OF THE PERFORMANCE.
SOLUTION: ELIMINATE THE AUDIENCE.
EXCEPTION: A HAPPENING MAY BE SCORED
FOR JUST WATCHING.

BACKSTAGE LABOR BROUGHT CENTER
STAGE.

THE NITELAND FANTASY OF DE -
INDUSTRIALIZATION + WHAT
CAME BEFORE.

FLASH MOB GAVE CONFORMITY A
VEHICLE TO APPEAR NON-CONFORMING.

POETRY TAKEN BROADLY TO MEAN
WORK THAT CHALLENGES THE EXPECTATIONS
OF ITS CATEGORY, + THIS CHALLENGE
MARKS VIABILITY.

THE MAB SPRING IS AN EVENT
THAT IS ALWAYS BECOMING.

PEDAGOGY AS TRANSMISSION.

Mashinka Firunts & Danny Snelson, eds.
The Block Museum | Northwestern University
Department of Art History | Mellon Dance Studies
The Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities
<http://sites.northwestern.edu/present>