

EDITORIAL

by

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In the spring of 2014, I was a Fulbright Scholar at School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. I taught a semester-long Collaborative Playwriting Workshop in the Department of American Literature, School of English, to twelve juniors and seniors, using a technique called Moment Work, developed by Moisés Kaufman and the U.S.-based Tectonic Theatre Company. In Kaufman's own words, in a personal interview in 2002 to Rich Brown, Moment Work centers on the "copulation of form and content." It is a method, as described on the theater website, of "developing, analyzing, and re-imagining theatre" ("Our process: Moment Work"), in which the performance writers examine form and content, their interplay, and explore the full poetic possibilities of the stage within the context of the subject matter.

We began our journey by reading Tectonic Theatre Company's *The Laramie Project*, a play about the brutal murder of a gay man, Matthew Shepard, in Wyoming, and the impact that act of violence had on the community. Through this play we looked at a pivotal event in the United States and the theatre's ability to participate in and contribute to the national dialogue on hate crimes and homophobia in American culture. We examined the structure of the play, and the way Moment Work is used to develop the script. Students then brainstormed topics and were divided into groups based on their interest. The themes of "Happiness," "Hopes and Dreams," and "Crossroads" emerged. They were asked to develop interview questions pertinent to their topic and conduct interviews. The use to which the students put their interviews was varied and delightful. The "Hopes and Dreams" group used text directly from interviews in their moments and as a springboard for character development. The group "Happiness" used interviews as a means to develop characters and from the characters as narrative emerged. "Crossroads" used the experience of trying to interview as a central action for their play. None of the students had written a play before, and most had never performed. The students displayed remarkable commitment to the task of building an ensemble, developing original work together, and performing their work in a public performance that was the culmination of the playwriting workshop. Their investment and inspiration was exciting and a pleasure to witness.

In order to fully understand the three short plays that resulted from the workshop, I must place them in the context of Moment Work. Moment Work is a technique for writing performance. It seeks to use all elements of the stage, to highlight and celebrate the unique language of the stage. For a particular moment, what is the language of light? How does color speak in a particular context? What meaning(s) does a particular prop signify? What is the nature of time right now? How do any or all of these theatrical elements interact with or against the text? Is there written text? The text becomes one of many possibilities for expressing on the stage. An essential premise of Moment Work is

to unseat written text as the central and most important element in a play, and to discover the best language suited to the emerging narrative. In this process, “moments” are created. Moments are distinct units of time that are fully articulated with all chosen elements of the stage speaking at once. Costume is used from the start, as are light, texture, sound, and video. As we observe moments, we begin to see what is repeated, what aesthetic is emerging, and what we think on a subconscious level about our subject. We look at both the form and content of the moments. How does a certain form relate to the content? How does the content work with or against the form?

The second step in this process is to explore sequencing, how moments play in time based on the order in which they appear. We begin to attend to structure. In our process, we had the time to make moments and do an initial sequencing for the performance. A next step would be to examine structure more deeply and to make moments that serve the transitional spaces in the plays.

What is read is only the text and basic written instructions of the physical world of the play. What is intrinsic but unseen is the language of light in “Hopes and Dreams,” in which flashlights and spotlights served to illuminate the stage, pinpointing light, of hope, as the play unfolds surrounded by darkness barely kept at bay, a darkness reflective of Greece in the midst of economic crisis. In “Happiness” the physical scores set to music or soundscape are as evocative as the disembodied mouth speaking the introductory monologue. For “Crossroads,” the unique way video is used to make a moment of theatrical magic cannot be conveyed by the written word. The content is conveyed, but not the forms or the ways in which the content intrinsically plays with the forms, which is a marked difference between traditional playwriting and the performance-writing technique of Moment Work.

In our class, the students were asked to develop new work in collaboration with their groups and challenged to perform their work for the public. These young creator/performers presented an evening of short works that were fully embodied, imaginative, and, above all, truly theatrical.

Works Cited

Kaufman, Moisés. Personal Interview by Rich Brown. 11 Nov. 2002.
“Our process: Moment Work.” *Tectonic Theater Project*. Web. 12 August 2014.