

'WITH AN EYE TO ITS MOVEMENT':  
REVITALIZING LITERATURE THROUGH REMIX AND PERFORMANCE

by

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## ABSTRACT

‘With an Eye to its Movement’: Revitalizing Literature Through Remix and Performance

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This narrative inquiry documents the inaugural *Performance at the Center* summer institute, a professional development program in which teachers worked alongside students to generate an original multimodal performance piece inspired by Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Specifically, the study examines text-inspired creation: how readers identify and then create out of the gaps and spaces in a given text through remix and performance.

This researcher employs qualitative methods to address the following questions: (1) How do *Performance at the Center* facilitators set up the conditions for text-inspired creation? (2) How do teacher and student players describe what effect, if any, *Performance at the Center* has on their reading of *Frankenstein*? and (3) How do select teacher players describe what effect, if any, *Performance at the Center* has had on their design and implementation of curriculum?

Examining her data through the lens of “the gift” (Marcel Mauss and Lewis Hyde), this researcher finds that facilitators set up the conditions for text-inspired creation by stepping into the role of muse—offering both tangible and intangible “gifts” to prompt production. Teachers and students describe the ways in which *Performance at the Center* invites sensory entry into Shelley’s text, enabling readers to compose meanings potentially inaccessible through words alone. Select teachers describe the ways in which *Performance at the Center* catalyzes a reconceptualization of what it means to teach literature, underscoring as it does the profound distinction between *dissecting* a text and *experiencing* a text. This investigation suggests that positioning the study of literature within a gift culture—receiving literature as a living gift to be

passed on through student text-inspired creation—has the potential revitalize texts, teachers and the classroom itself.

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## Chapter I

### PUZZLING THE PIECES

*But also we read such books with another aim, not to throw light on literature,  
not to become familiar with famous people, but to refresh and exercise our creative powers...*  
-Virginia Woolf, *How Should One Read a Book?*

#### **A Crisis in Reading**

In 2007, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) published its findings from a research study entitled *To Read or Not To Read: A Question of National Importance*. A follow up to the NEA's 2004 report *Reading at Risk* (a report based upon survey data collected since 1982 from over 17,000 adults drawn from every demographic group), the 2007 report augmented the 2004 data through national studies conducted by U.S. federal agencies supplemented by academic, foundation and business surveys. As Dana Gioia, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, notes in the report's introduction, "When one assembles data from disparate sources, the results often present contradictions...here the results are startling in their consistency" (p.5). Though the report revealed progress in years since 2004 in reading ability among elementary level students, there was a marked decline in reading among teenage and adult Americans.

The 2004 report had found that all Americans (in nearly every demographic category) were reading fiction, poetry and drama "at significantly lower rates than 10 or 20 years

earlier...[and] the declines were steepest among young adults”; the 2007 report revealed a continuation of this trend (p.7). According to the 2004 report, almost half of all Americans read no books for pleasure; less than a fourth (22%) of all 17 year olds were daily readers. The 2004 report had looked at voluntary reading, but the 2007 study expanded its scope to include compulsory reading for school. In the 2007 study, 81% of high school students reported in 2005 “reading assigned texts or materials for coursework” only 0-3 hours a week. When the language of the question was altered in 2006 to inquire how many hours high school students were engaged in “reading/studying for class,” 55% reported 0-1 hour per week. Gioia characterizes the “story the data tell [as] simple, consistent, and alarming” (p.5).

As a high school English teacher, I had been alarmed by the similar story emerging among my own students. Teaching a ninth grade curriculum grounded in classical literature and mythology, many of our shared texts at the start of the year were Greek dramas. I found when I assigned portions of these dramas to be read for homework, I would be greeted with blank stares the next day when I referenced the readings. So I adjusted: we performed the Greek dramas together in class (the right move, I rationalized, because these were texts meant to be performed). But when we moved on to works of epic poetry, the trend continued. “What’s going on?” I asked. “Why aren’t you reading?”

“I can’t get into it,” one student said.

“Yeah,” another piped up. “I just don’t get it!”

And so I modeled aloud how I read the text; we practiced annotating with questions and observations. I sent them off to read once more on their own. They returned. They still hadn’t read. They just couldn’t read on their own, they said. They needed to read together, as a class. I caved once more. We read together.

But that first year teaching ninth grade English in 2008, I was besieged on Parent/Teacher night by requests for more reading assignments. “She used to be such a reader,” one mother said, “a book in her hand always. Now, in high school, nothing. They need to be reading.” I agreed. So I instituted a curricular strand of independent reading, a list of literary texts curated in collaboration with the school librarian; independent reading would run parallel to what we were reading together in class. Students were expected to read on their own outside of class and one day a week, we would spend twenty minutes reading silently together in class—DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time, I called it, drawing upon my own experience as an elementary school student. Some students read voraciously, their faces hidden within a new book every week. Yet most carried the same book with them week in and week out, bookmark making its way ever so slowly towards the back cover. I asked one such student, Ty, how his reading was progressing. “I don’t know,” he said. He sighed. “It’s tough. I guess I just need a reason to read.”

### **Record of a Vanished Moment I: Building Worlds**

Seattle, 2004. It is my second year of drama school, and I am cast as Ophelia in Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. The costume designer fits me with a shimmering tunic dress. The make-up artist spends hours before each show piling braids atop my head. And I, as Ophelia, appear on stage exactly four times, for a total of fewer than two minutes:

- 1) Appearance #1: I run onstage, pursued by Hamlet. He grabs my arm, spins me around, looks intently at my face, then lets me go. We sprint off in opposite directions.

2) Appearance #2: I am a tacit observer in the court procession to greet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. I walk on stage. Wait. Watch. Walk off stage.

3) Appearance #3: This third entrance brings my line—my glorious line!—as I wander on stage with a prayer book:

*HAMLET: Nymph, in thy orisons be all thy sins remembered.*

*OPHELIA: Good my lord, how does your honor for this many a day?*

Hamlet and I exit to continue our conversation elsewhere.

4) Appearance #4: In my fourth and final entrance, I stagger onto stage sobbing. Hamlet again grabs my arm, tells me to get to a nunnery, then hurls me to the floor. I crawl off center stage, right down the exit ramp, still weeping.

I then dry Ophelia's tears and spend the remainder of the play in my dressing room, examining the progressive emergence of black and blue marks on my arm (both the actor playing Hamlet and I were quite committed to realism) and biding my time until curtain call. That's it. I am teaching a section of undergraduate drama students at the time and after the weekend of performances, my class peppers me with questions. Most are the usual—questions about the rehearsal process, specific queries about moments in the play. Then one student asks, "What was that like? To have such a nothing part? Was that hard?" We are sitting in a circle on the floor of a rehearsal hall at the time and the fluorescent lights glint off the sheen of the wooden floor. "You know, it's funny—I never thought of it as a nothing part," I say.

"Because there are no small parts, only small actors?" he says. We all laugh.

"Yes, of course! But also, I mean... it's Ophelia. Most actresses dream of playing Ophelia!" I say.

“In *Hamlet*, though. Most actresses dream of playing Ophelia in *Hamlet*,” another student says.

“That’s a good point,” I say. “But is it really so different?”

Is it? Is it really so different? As I rehearse for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, I begin to feel as though I *am* in *Hamlet*—only our production of *Hamlet* is happening off stage, just out of sight of the audience. Through *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Stoppard has designed what some might understand as a parallel world. Shakespeare’s world of Hamlet, so often the focus of audience attention, had receded into the wings as the realm of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern takes precedence. Those moments when Ophelia appears on stage are instances of overlap, of convergence. Ophelia figures more prominently in Hamlet’s story but is a mere throwaway character in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s narrative—incidental, immaterial. And yet as she stumbles (and tumbles) into their narrative, Ophelia carries with her all that has happened in the wings; Ophelia is still the Ophelia of Shakespeare’s creation. I explain to my students that I always consider the two narratives to run simultaneously—*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* in one theater, *Hamlet* in the theater next door. On the adjoining stage, the minor characters in one story receive a starring role, and the stars become extras. So only those in the audience of Stoppard’s play think Ophelia to be a “nothing part.”

In preparing to play Ophelia, I read and reread *Hamlet* (*And I, of ladies most deject and wretched*) swirling the words round and round in my mouth (*that sucked the honey of his music vows*) as I make breakfast (*Now see that noble and most sovereign reason*), on the walk to class (*like sweet bells jangled*), in those last moments before sleep (*out of tune and harsh...*). Those words in *Hamlet*, though, are just a glimpse of Ophelia; I need to know more. I wonder what happens after Hamlet casts her off—where does she go in that moment? What does she

do? And the next day? And the next? How do she and Hamlet fall in love to begin? Are they really in love? These questions, of course, are the questions any actor would ask, for this is how one builds a role; the actor must imaginatively construct the life of a character. Sometimes the playwright offers more of that life, sometimes less, but regardless, the original text necessarily leaves holes, gaps that the actor must fill and expand. The actor must build a world.

### **Building Worlds: A Personal History**

First, to explain (or, rather, to confess): I was embarrassingly baffled when Ty first told me that he needed “a reason to read.” *A reason to read?* Why would one ever need a “reason” to read? I had grown up surrounded by books. My dad had been raised in a household with the television as its heartbeat, so he determined that our childhood would be different. We brought home stacks of books from the library each week. The light above my bed fell off the wall on many a night in my haste to flip the switch as I heard that tell-tale floorboard creak outside my room, with the inevitable admonition through the door: “Adele--that’s enough. No more reading.” At the mall (this was New Jersey), I would disappear into the bookstore and plough through the latest *Babysitters Club* book while standing up. I was ravenous, indiscriminate—*Wuthering Heights* followed *The Hardy Boys* followed *Sophie’s Choice*. In fourth grade, my elementary teacher wrote home and told my parents that he had caught me reading during math class, the latest Maeve Binchy novel lodged within the pages of my textbook. Literary critic J. Hillis Miller (2002) contends that “human beings not only have a propensity to dwell in imaginative worlds...they have a positive need to do so” (p.81). So I began to think about my “positive need” for imaginative dwelling space, about *how* I entered those worlds with such ease.

When I was three, my brother, Marc, was five, and he wanted a Santa suit—inexplicably and desperately. My parents made a deal with him: if he memorized and performed *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, he would have his Santa suit. Marc memorized the poem. I gathered together my dolls and was cast as “Ma in her kerchief.” We took an old sheet and colored in a fireplace in craypas, cutting slits in the bottom so when draped over an open doorway, “Santa” would have room to enter through the chimney. On Christmas Eve, my brother and I performed the poem and my cousin Harry burst through the craypas chimney in Marc’s new Santa suit. From then on, we performed a show on Christmas Eve each year—choreographing songs, writing scenes. I never thought much of it; it was just what we did (because we certainly weren’t the athletes in the family).

But when I think about it now, I realize how profoundly those annual shows may have influenced my reading. When Marc memorized that poem, he didn’t simply recite the words by rote. As soon as I put on my “kerchief” and he put on his “cap,” we lifted the words off the page; we recreated the textual world. And this recreation set a precedent and established a pattern: whenever I or we read anything, we would try to bring it to life. In his 1998 *The Practice of Reading*, Denis Donoghue writes:

I believe that the purpose of reading literature is to exercise or incite one’s imagination; specifically, one’s ability to imagine being different...Reading a poem or a novel, attending a play, looking at a painting or a building, listening to music—these experiences should provoke me to imagine what it would mean to have a life different from my own. (p.56)

Donoghue here discusses literature’s value as a means to push the bounds of the reader’s own experience, but he also implies the role of literature as a catalyst for action. Reading literature “exercise[s]”, “incite[s]” and “provoke[s] the imagination, suggesting that the imagination then takes action—that the imagination then works to create.



Proponent of imaginative education Kieran Egan (2007) tells us that the imagination exists as a feature of the mind recognized by all cultures: “a capacity that allows us to call up mental images, think about things that are not present, or consider things that do not exist” (p.3). So, prompted by the reading of literature, the imagination begins “to call up mental images,” to construct “things that do not exist.” Those “imaginative worlds” in which human beings “have a propensity to dwell” are thus not pre-formed and waiting within the literature itself but created by the reader in transaction with the text (Miller, 2002, p.81). For Marc and me, however, this was more than visualization. We didn’t just discuss what that fireplace might *look like*; we talked about how to *make* it. We made literal our imaginative transaction with the text through creation.

I suppose in retrospect then, it shouldn’t have been a surprise that when required to give a book report on *Anne of Green Gables* when I was nine, I wrote and performed a version of the story as a play, asking my classmates to participate. It shouldn’t have been unexpected that my summers at camp were spent choreographing songs for the Talent Shows. It wasn’t because I was a dancer or had any special affinity for music; it was because I was trying to make sense of the lyrics through movement. I never thought in those early years that I read with any “reason to read” but, looking back, maybe I did. Always, I read to create.

When I entered high school and then college, I found that I wasn’t alone in this impulse to create out of text: I found the theatre community and became an actor. The playwright gives actors (and directors and designers) the initial text but then they, ever loyal to that playwright’s words, begin imaginatively authoring around and through and out of that text. Play rehearsals become a process of imaginative construction, each creative decision an act of authorship. When a character enters the stage, where has she been right before? When she exits, where is she

going? What is she wearing? Does she wear skirts? Pants? What parts of her body does she want to show off? What parts does she want to hide? Does she have pockets? What does she keep in those pockets? Every choice matters.

From my time as an actor, I still have marble notebooks stuffed with diary entries from character perspectives and images ripped from magazines, all in service of building a role. I still have notes scrawled on paper napkins from those interviews with Vietnam veterans' wives (conducted at the I-95 Denny's) when I was researching the character of Ellen in *Miss Saigon* (a revisionist production set in a veterans' hall twenty years after the war). I used those images and notebooks and napkins to fill in the blanks left by the playwright—to flesh out my character's world. As an actor *reading* a script, I felt a responsibility to *write*.

### **Pushing the Bounds: Imaginative Extension**

But for an actor, the assembly of this imaginative world is covert, peeking out in a costume choice or a glance in a moment of silence but largely hidden beneath the script; actors are often the only ones who think, for instance, about what a character might be doing once he or she exits the stage. Tom Stoppard, though, in his *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, forces both actors and audience members to recognize character life as unbounded and ongoing. We performed *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* in a proscenium theater, and I began to consider the proscenium arch a frame for the action to which the audience is privy. Beyond the edges of the 'frame,' the action doesn't end; it simply isn't visible.

Tom Stoppard imaginatively extends *Hamlet* through *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, and Paula Vogel does something similar with *Othello* through her *Desdemona*. Vogel's *Desdemona* presents a wild, sexually voracious Desdemona—a woman far from the deferential,

mEEK Desdemona of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Like Stoppard, Vogel creates a parallel world, her play encapsulating the private action happening off stage during the course of Shakespeare's play. And though her Desdemona appears qualitatively different from the Desdemona we meet in *Othello*, Vogel's character does not necessarily work in opposition to Shakespeare's narrative.<sup>1</sup> In *Othello*, Desdemona defies her father to marry the Moor. Othello himself talks about the way in which Desdemona becomes transfixed by his tales of battle and adventure: "She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd, And I loved her that she did pity them" (I.iii). Othello's "dangers" excite Desdemona; why wouldn't a woman so thrilled by peril be crass and unreserved in private? In exposing Desdemona's private world, Vogel's play becomes a commentary on the constraints imposed by the patriarchal society of Shakespeare's play, suggesting that *Othello* might not allow us to see the 'real' Desdemona. We return to *Othello* with new eyes, on the lookout for glimpses of the Desdemona we have known through Vogel. We begin to understand how limited our perspective on Desdemona has been without exposure to Vogel's parallel world.

A play, then, becomes a metaphor for our necessarily bounded view of the 'real' world. We star in our own personal play (I think here of the oft quoted Jacques speech from *As You Like It*) and people (characters) enter and exit this drama. We embrace some as major players and dismiss others as minor extras. But every character—every single person—simultaneously stars in his or her own personal play, as fully realized as our own. The action for those characters continues as they exit the 'proscenium frame' of our production and amble off into the 'wings.' They don't disappear, though; their personal play is happening in the theater next door. If we were to look from a bird's eye perspective, we would see millions—billions—

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<sup>1</sup> While Vogel draws upon Shakespeare's *Othello* as source material, Shakespeare, too, creates out of his own reading. Professor Stephen Dickey of the University of California at Los Angeles points to the way in which Shakespeare builds upon (and deviates from) Giraldi Cinthio's collection of stories, "Gli Hecatommithi" (1565) in writing *Othello*, Cinthio's stories providing the basic narrative of Othello and Desdemona's romance. Thus, Vogel's *Desdemona* adds yet another layer to the intertextuality at work.

of separate worlds in motion, endlessly converging and diverging. So what if we began to view those minor characters in our own lives, those Ophelias of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, as main characters in their own right? What if we began to notice the ways in which some characters in our lives, some of those Desdemonas, conceal in *our* play what they might reveal in the play next door?

Stoppard and Vogel both piqued my interest in the potential power of parallel world creation—the effect of conscious, visible authoring out of an existing text. And I began to think...what if my students, what if Ty, could approach a text in the same way? What if he could read not only to *recreate* but to fill and expand and *create*? And what if his text-inspired creations could enable others to see the source text—and even the world—anew? Would that not be “a reason to read?”

### **Text-Inspired Creation: The Emergence of Read/ Write Culture**

Law professor Lawrence Lessig (2008) argues that with the advent of the digital age, we have shifted from a Read Only (RO) culture to a Read/Write (RW) culture. Lessig explains that an RO culture is one in which there exists only a small cadre of approved artists producing material to be read. These producers become authorities (and are thus defined as “professionals”), their material generally not designed to inspire questions or response; the RO culture is a consumer culture. The RW culture, by contrast, emerges as one in which all are both consumers *and* producers. In the RW culture, all are expected to write in response to what they read, so those who produce might be professionals, but they also might be amateurs. Material in an RW culture “asks more of the audience...it is offered as a draft...it invites a response” (Lessig, 2008, p.84). A blog post, for example, contains a section for comments; through those comments, an audience and community form, encouraging discussion and conversation. The

Internet, Lessig points out, “is the place where all writing gets to be RW...to write in this medium is to know that anything one writes is open to debate” (p.66).

When Lessig references “all writing,” he pushes for an expansion of the definition of “writing” itself. Lessig proclaims:

Text is today’s Latin. It is through text that we elites communicate (look at you, reading this book). For the masses, however, most information is gathered through other forms of media: TV, film, music, and music video. These forms of ‘writing’ are the vernacular of today. They are the kinds of ‘writing’ that matters most to most. (p.67)

And just as readers embrace new modes of expression with the digital age, so, too, do writers. In his 2012 publication of *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*, Joseph Harris articulates the way in which this new notion of writing affects composition:

A writer works not only with the resources of her language but with the artifacts of her culture—print texts, web pages, photos, music, videos, graphic art, and the like. The challenge is not only to respond to these materials but to creatively reuse them. Rather than looking within the self for meaning, the writer looks outward, to the culture around her, reworking and redesigning the texts and materials it has to offer her. (p.171)

Harris credits the New London Group with this reconceptualization of composition. Bringing together ten scholars from the United States, Australia, and Great Britain one September week in 1994, the New London Group convened in New London, New Hampshire to discuss literacy pedagogy. In the spring of 1996, the Group published its conclusions in the *Harvard Educational Review*, calling for a veritable revolution. Literacy pedagogy in the past, the Group argues, has been focused on the “formalized, the monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language” (p.61). Given the advent of globalization, however, literacy pedagogy must account for an increasingly diverse cultural and linguistic society and “must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (Cazden et. al., 1996, p.61). The New London Group terms this new literacy pedagogy

“multiliteracies.” The pedagogy of multiliteracies recognizes visual, audio and spatial behavior as text, and the Group contends, “when technologies of meaning are changing so rapidly, there cannot be one set of standards or skills that constitute the ends of literacy learning, however taught” (p.64).

In the years since the publication of the New London Group “manifesto” (as the Group itself calls its 1996 article), the pedagogy of multiliteracies has become commingled with New Literacy theory in literacy scholarship, though some insist that while New Literacy theory tends to focus on emergent technologies, the pedagogy of multiliteracies encompasses activities “that emphasize other multiplicities (print, talk, image, gesture, art, or even multiple readings of texts of various sorts)” (Cervetti, Damico & Pearson, 2006, p.379). New Literacy theory examines the literacies of digital technologies while the pedagogy of multiliteracies explores the literacies of multiple modalities. Both, however, “involve an expansion of the boundaries of what counts as literacy and literate competency,” and this expansion is both metaphoric and literal (Cervetti, Damico & Pearson, 2006, p.379). In a metaphoric sense, teachers must begin to recognize literacy as more than a discrete set of language-bound skills. In a literal sense, they must look beyond the boundaries of their classrooms and “question[] the traditional monologic relationship between teacher and student, setting out to make the classroom walls more porous and to take the students’ experiences, interests, and existing technological and discourse resources as a starting point” (Jewitt, 2008, p.245). As Len Unsworth summarizes in his 2008 *New Literacies and the English Curriculum: A Multimodal Perspective*: “There seems to be broad agreement that literacy can no longer be thought of as involving language alone and that images, in paper media texts, and also sound, movement and gesture in digital multimedia texts, need to be considered along with language as fundamental meaning-making resources in constructing text” (p.178).

Yet even as the “meaning-making resources” available multiply through the exponential growth of digital media, even as the number of “producers” in the Read/Write (RW) culture continues to increase, Lessig maintains that RW culture does not detract from the literary tradition intrinsic in Read Only (RO) culture. To the contrary, Lessig writes, “You pay respect to tradition by incorporating it. But you make the tradition compelling by doing so in a way that makes everyone want to understand it more” (p. 95). Producers in an RW culture refocus attention onto the materials of RO culture. Unsworth (2008) writes, “For many of these young people there is no necessary dichotomy between avid readership of novels and extensive and intensive online activities” (p.2661). Unsworth points to the *Harry Potter* craze as evidence of children’s and adolescents’ continued attraction to literature. This “craze” includes not just consumption of the *Harry Potter* novels and movies, but myriad forms of production: fan fiction, websites, chat room discussions, online reviews, game narratives, image creations.

Unsworth suggests that young adults have no difficulty fashioning text-inspired creations on their own; “however, there is a vast chasm between most children’s experience of literature and the associated written response genres in school contexts and the rich digital story-worlds of established and innovative literary works and associated dynamic, multimodal response options available on the www” (p.2671-2). The pedagogy of multiliteracies and New Literacy theory tell us that “a mix of images and sounds [might make] its point far more powerfully than any eight-hundred word essay in the *New York Times* could” (Lessig, 2008, p. 73). So my student, Ty, might not need to write “any eight hundred word essay”; he might generate a “hybrid[] of words, texts, images and sounds—or [he might] work within the expressive possibilities of a single form” (Harris, 2012, p.174). Carey Jewitt reminds us that “what is positioned as *new* literacy practices in the school may be *new to school* but are often already well established among many

young people” (p.248). So I, as Ty’s teacher, needed to begin to bridge that “vast chasm” between school and the practices of New Literacies.

### **A Paradigm Shift in Literacies**

As Len Unsworth (2008) notes, “A growing body of research indicates that increasingly, students are coming to school more literate in some dimensions of the New Literacies...than their teachers...there is a need for curriculum design and classroom teaching to be responsive to these changes and, in so doing to acknowledge the relevant experience and expertise of children” (p.372). Gina Cervetti, James Damico, and P. David Pearson (2006) characterize the advent of what they call “multiple literacies” and “new literacies” as a paradigm shift in the way that we understand learning. Maxine Hairston (1982), in her “The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing,” recounts history of science professor Thomas Kuhn’s definition of a paradigm:

When a scientific field is going through a stable period, most of the practitioners in the discipline hold a common body of beliefs and assumptions; they agree on the problems that need to be solved, the rules that govern research, and on the standards by which performance is to be measured. They share a conceptual model Kuhn calls a paradigm... (p.76)

When practitioners in a field begin to encounter problems that cannot be understood through their established paradigm, they brush them aside or make slight shifts in the paradigm to accommodate. As problems amass over time, however, and reach a point at which they cannot be ignored, certain forward thinking practitioners generate a new conceptual model. “And if enough scientists become convinced that the new paradigm works better than the old one, they will accept it as the new norm”; this constitutes a *paradigm shift* (Hairston, 1982, p.76).



In casting “multiple literacies” and “new literacies” as a *paradigm shift* in learning, Cervetti, Damico and Pearson suggest that the field of literacy studies has reached a juncture at which old conceptual models of literacy no longer suffice. The new literacies emerging present too great a challenge to existing literacy conceptual models to be seen as mere anomalies; they imply that a shift must occur. And yet as Hairston notes, those who have advocated the traditional paradigm will resist change and cling to the conceptual model they know:

...most of the resistance to the new paradigm will [only] dissipate when its advocates can demonstrate that it will solve problems that the traditional paradigm could not solve. Most of the new generation of scholars working in the field will adopt the new model, and older practitioners will come around to it. (p.77)

In order for the influx of “multiliteracies” and “new literacies” to constitute a paradigm shift, then, a “new generation of scholars” must recognize these literacies as the new paradigm. As such, this shift presents an opportunity for teacher education programs to become instrumental in transforming school practice. But how?

Cervetti, Damico and Pearson initiate a review of literature around multiple literacies and new literacies in an attempt to glean some recommendations for the adoption of this new literacy paradigm. They distill their findings into three main themes (recounted here verbatim):

Teacher education programs must...

- 1) Engage teachers in learning about and analyzing technology and media
- 2) Help teachers develop a broader understanding of literacy
- 3) Help teachers understand their own and their students’ multiple literacies

In brief, pre-service programs “should help teachers develop a broader understanding of literacy that moves beyond a singular, psychological, fixed, skill-focused view to a view of literacy as inherently situated in personal, historical, cultural and social contexts” (p.380). Cervetti, Damico and Pearson recommend that pre-service teachers study in student “life spaces”—after school

programs, community programs, “places where multiple literacies are likely to present themselves as a matter of course” (p.383). Many of the studies they reference examine the practice of multiple literacies outside of school, what Mahiri (2005) terms *voluntary practices*. Cervetti, Damico and Pearson urge that pre-service teachers “be involved in programs that allow them to embrace the complexities and even the contradictions inherent in teaching and learning ecologies,” programs that do not necessarily adhere in lockstep to the current educational policies and assessments so that they can begin to trouble fixed conceptions of literacy (p.383). To advance their own technological facility, pre-service teachers “should learn about, through and with technology-based media” (p.383).

Though Cervetti, Damico and Pearson position their recommendations specifically for pre-service teachers, the directives they lay out might apply to any professional development program for in-service teachers. One might even argue that those directives *must* apply to professional development programs. For the vast majority of teachers are not pre-service, but in-service, already established and working in schools. And if I and other in-service teachers could move beyond a “fixed, skill-focused view...of literacy,” could study in student “life spaces,” and have the opportunity to “learn about, through and with technology-based media,” then maybe Cervetti, Damico and Pearson might not have to rely on external teacher education programs. Maybe schools could be transformed from within.

### **Record of a Vanished Moment II: The Need to Create Together**

New York, 2013. I sit in the conference room at work. My principal sits at the head of the table, the consultant from the school’s network across from me. I have been called in for a meeting about our newest pilot program: mastery based learning. “So your students have laptops?” the consultant asks, smiling.

“Yes,” I say, “We use them almost every day.”

“Great,” she says. “So they’ll just move through the work at their own pace—”

I interrupt. “Excuse me?” I ask, “What work? Is the course entirely online now? Am I creating this online course?” I look at my principal. “Did I miss something?” The consultant laughs.

“Oh, no,” she says, “You can get something prepackaged.” I can feel my eyes widening. “Or,” she hastens to add, “you could create content yourself. Up to you. But then they can all move through as they’re ready.”

“Move through,” I repeat.

“Right,” she says, still smiling brightly. “Isn’t it incredible what we can do in the digital age? We can really differentiate and individualize learning.”

“Is there any version of mastery based learning that doesn’t involve students sitting silently in front of laptops?” I say.

“Excuse me?” she says.

“I just,” I glance again at my principal who nods to me ever so slightly. I swallow and try to keep my tone measured. “I have thirty five ninth graders in each class, right? And I understand—they’re all moving at their own paces. Believe me, I understand that. But if this is what we think is the answer, then why are we in school?” She is silent. “I mean, really? My classroom is small, I’m constantly tripping over backpacks, so what’s the point? If they’re all just going to file in and log on and look at a screen...why even bother?” I trail off.

“And what would you suggest?” she asks. She’s no longer smiling.

“I don’t know,” I said. “But I want us to look at each other. I want my students to *need* to look at each other. I want us to *need* to be in the same room together. The things that make us do that—that make us need each other—those are the things we should do in school.”

### **How to Make This Happen? An Idea**

In the winter of 2011, New York City Writing Project director Erick Gordon approached me with an idea. He wanted to create a new summer program for high students combining writing and drama and, many conversations later, the concept for *Writers on Stage* was born. We would bring together fifteen high school students selected by application from schools around New York City. Prior to arriving at the program, the students would read a chosen text (in that first year, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*). For two and a half weeks, students would have guest teaching artist workshops each morning (specialists in movement, improvisation, music) and then writing workshops every afternoon, all inspired by Carroll’s text. The goal was to piece together a performance generated through all of the workshops by the close of the three weeks.

Towards the end of the first week, students picked out of a hat and each chose one character from the story upon which to focus. They wrote monologues and nonsense poems and letters to and from Alice. At the end of the three weeks, they performed an hour long piece entitled ‘The Other Side of Sanity’ (a title selected by vote) for the concurrent Writing Project teacher institute. The next summer, we repeated the program with the grounding text of Salman Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, bringing in many of the same guest teaching artists (though some selected specifically for Rushdie’s story—a specialist in Indian music, another in Indian dance) and again closing the three weeks with an original performance.

In both iterations, I (as a facilitator) was struck by three constants:

1) The students came into the three weeks not knowing the chosen text very well; we had to start each summer with activities to establish a basic map of the story. Yet by the end of the three weeks, most students could speak to nuances of a given character. They could reference the text almost verbatim without looking at it. And *I* came into the three weeks not knowing the chosen text very well. Our various workshops and writing activities only revealed progressively the extent to which I *didn't* know the text. I learned alongside the students.

2) At the beginning of the three weeks, I would remind the students that our time together would culminate in an original performance. They would be scared--they had no idea what that might look like. It seemed impossible. I had no idea what it might look like; I was scared too. But by saying aloud that we would do it, we committed to making it happen. There was power in that performance deadline.

3) The majority of students didn't know one another at the beginning of the three weeks. There was some resistance during workshops as they paired with peers they didn't know. Certain students who would elicit eye rolls from their fellows during rehearsal. But on the day of the performance, the students were quick to cover another's line, to scramble in search of another's lost prop. They supported one another in service of the larger project at hand.

Through *Writers on Stage*, we all had our reason to read: like Tom Stoppard and Paula Vogel, we were *reading to create*. But unlike Stoppard and Vogel, we were creating through multiple modes: “no one mode [stood] alone in the process of making meaning; rather, each

play[ed] a discrete role in the whole” (Jewitt, 2008, p.247).<sup>2</sup> A spoken monologue was followed by a silent movement piece, juxtaposed with a song. Our final performance emerged as a collage, a hybrid of meaning-making modes. We may not have been using digital technologies, but this was a project grounded in the pedagogy of multiliteracies.

When Erick and I began discussing the possibility of a Writers on Stage summer institute (now re-named *Performance at the Center*) at Teachers College, we both wanted to make that connection to multiliteracies and New Literacy theory more explicit. We talked about integrating film and music mash-ups and the digital manipulation of images into the final performance. Many students would be familiar with these technologies, we surmised, and we could capitalize on what they knew. Simultaneously, Erick was planning a concurrent professional development institute for teachers also focused on multiliteracies and New Literacy theory. The teachers should visit the student institute, we said, maybe even come in and participate in a workshop one day? They could see this pedagogy in action. Then Ruth Vinz had a different idea. “Why don’t you put the students and teachers together?” she said. “Why not make it one institute?”

One institute? Students and teachers together? Professional development for teachers had incorporated students before; most often, students would act in the capacity of consultants, advising teachers on how best to change their practices. While students might be partnering with teachers, though, their roles remained distinct and fixed: student-consultant and teacher-learner (Downes & Toolin, 2009). In an institute to examine multiliteracies, this casting seemed apt. After all, if, as Len Unsworth (2008) tells us, “students are coming to school more literate in some dimensions of the New Literacies...than their teachers,” then teachers should position

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<sup>2</sup> A mode in this case is defined as a semiotic resource for meaning making; “multimodality attends to meaning as it is made through the situated configurations across image, gesture, gaze, body posture, sound, music, speech and so on” (Jewitt, 2008, p.246).

themselves as the learners; the students have much to teach (p.372). But Unsworth also reminds us that though students may have a better understanding of the digital media available “fewer children have experience and understanding of the strategic use of the meaning-making resources of language, image and sound that the software gives them access to” (p.2672). To learn “strategic use,” students must turn to their teachers.

So students cannot simply act as consultants and teachers cannot simply be learners in the study of multiliteracies and New Literacy. And this is precisely what Ruth was suggesting: the eradication of the distinction between student and teacher. Upon entering the *Performance at the Center* summer institute, both students and teachers would become *players*, all contributing to the ensemble’s final production. In so doing, *Performance at the Center* would cultivate what Pierre Levy (1997) terms “collective intelligence,” the notion that nobody knows all, everybody knows something and the knowledge of any one member is available to the whole group. Henry Jenkins and Wyn Kelley (2013) argue that collective intelligence resides at the heart of New (Media) Literacy: “People working together and sharing information are able to address questions far more complex and arrive at answers far more quickly than any single member could do” (p.1852-3). Yet the purpose of the *Performance at the Center* summer institute was not to “arrive at answers,” but to further complexify the questions—together, to delve more and more deeply into the chosen shared text. This is why, I think, in those first two years of *Writers on Stage*, our guest artist workshops progressively revealed how little I understood of the text: as I examined *Alice in Wonderland* and then *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* more and more closely, I only uncovered further questions. Sheridan Blau (2003) might argue that this kind of “confusion” reveals a higher level of understanding; it is this kind of confusion that we, in the summer institute, harnessed our collective intelligence to seek out.

But if the core of the *Performance at the Center* summer institute was the collaborative exploration of a text through multiple modalities and it is “online reading and writing [that] are so closely connected that it is not possible to separate them,” then why would our “product” be offline (Leu et. al., 2009, p.266)? Why did we need to *perform*? Mia Perry and Carmen Medina (2011), researchers on embodiment and performance in pedagogy, write:

Whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, to analyze, celebrate, problematise it or not, we are all bodies, six point six billion of us, engaged to varying degrees in our own journeys of learning and living. (p.63)

Performance prompts or even forces us to recognize this corporeality. Bronwyn Davies (2000) asserts that it is “our minds that we are practised at knowing,” and “in our most familiar discourses, mind is separate from the body” (p.19). If, “in our most familiar discourses,” our minds are so often divorced from our bodies, then this disjunction becomes part of what is fixed and entrenched in our conceptions of literacy. How could we purport to explore multiliteracies, to broaden our understanding of literacy, if this divide between mind and body persisted? Perry and Medina conclude:

Embodiment in performative pedagogical practices, we maintain, describes teaching and learning in acknowledgement of our bodies as whole experiential beings in motion, both inscribed and inscribing subjectivities. That is, the experiential body is both a representation of self (a “text”) as well as a mode of creation in progress (a “tool”). (p.63)

Through *Performance at the Center*, we affirmed our bodies as “both inscribed and inscribing subjectivities.” We placed performance at the center of our work.

### **The Formation of a Study**

Given all that fascinates me—parallel world creation out of literary text, the interconnection between consumption and production in a swiftly growing Read/Write culture,



the shifting conceptualization of composition, the pedagogy of multiliteracies and New Literacy theory and the way in which those begin to trouble the distinction between teacher and student, the power of embodiment—*Performance at the Center* emerged as an ideal site of study. Through a qualitative narrative study, I aimed to explore the following **three** questions:

- 1) *How do Performance at the Center facilitators set up the conditions for text-inspired creation?*
- 2) *How do teacher and student players describe what effect, if any, Performance at the Center has on their reading of Frankenstein?*
- 3) *How do select teacher players describe what effect, if any, Performance at the Center has had on their design and implementation of curriculum?*

Though I had both participated in and witnessed the creation of multimodal responses to literature, never before had I asked other participants to articulate their own experiences. Because this summer institute (in contrast to the earlier iterations of *Writers on Stage*) invited teachers into the process as collaborators, *Performance at the Center* offered me as a teacher researcher the unique opportunity to examine the work of text-inspired creation through the perspectives of both high school students and pedagogues (the latter wearing the dual ‘hat’ of student *and* pedagogue).

### **Putting on the “Glasses” of the Gift**

*In fourth grade, the board at the front of my classroom starts to get blurry. I squint, strain, but can barely make out the words and equations. I begin to visit the box of tissues on my teacher’s desk hourly, then every half hour, then every ten minutes. Finally, my teacher pulls me*

*aside. No one needs that many tissues, he says. I nod. So, he says, what's going on? Well, I say, the tissues are near the board. My mom takes me to the optometrist two days later. I perch on the optometrist's enormous vinyl chair, the room dark, letters projected on the opposite wall in a glaring white light. I press my face against a cold metal contraption and peer through the two portholes. Click. Number one? he asks. Click. Or number two? Click. Number three? Click. Click. Maybe number one, I say. Click. Or number five, he says. Click. I can see the bottom row of letters now, the very bottom row. They're tiny but so crisp, so clear. Number five, I say. A week later, I no longer visit the tissue box. I have brown-rimmed glasses.*

When I entered the field for this study, I felt, once again, like I was sitting in that vinyl chair, lenses clicking by. I peered through the educational drama work of Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton, the process drama work of Cecily O'Neill, the spect-actor work of Augusto Boal, the "art as experience" work of John Dewey. It was still fuzzy. But then in the final week of the summer institute, in our three days alone with the teacher players, the topic of generosity surfaced. Everyone has been so generous, one teacher player remarked. The other teacher players murmured in agreement. Yes, another teacher player said, everyone has given so much. We have a gift culture here, one of my fellow facilitators said. I remember cocking my head and furrowing my brow, filing that phrase away: *a gift culture*. I need to learn more about gift cultures, I announce when Erick Gordon asks at the close of the summer institute how my research is progressing. You should read Lewis Hyde, he says. Pick up Lewis Hyde. I pick up Hyde's (1982) *The Gift: Imagination and the Life of Erotic Property* on Kindle, now the 2007 twenty-fifth anniversary edition: *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*. A chapter in, I look up, take a deep breath. In my mind's eye, I replay moments of the summer institute, underscored by snippets of the interviews and focus groups I had conducted. And I

begin to see that bottom row of letters. I do not yet know what they say, but I see them. This is the lens, I think; I have found my “glasses.”

Lewis Hyde (1982) draws on the seminal ethnological work of Marcel Mauss (1924) (explored in the following chapter) to conceptualize “the gift” in relation to the artist. The task Hyde sets for himself is twofold: “I have hoped to write an economy of the creative spirit: to speak of the inner gift that we accept as the object of our labor, and the outer gift that has become a vehicle of culture” (p.188). Hyde describes the way in which an artist initiates the process of creation by drawing on the reserves of his talent, often understood as his “‘gift,’ for although a talent can be perfected through an effort of the will, no effort in the world can cause its initial appearance” (p.100). In addition to harnessing the gift of his talent, the artist also creates out of inspiration, a gift bestowed—the Ancient Greeks would say—by the Muse, and so the ultimate creation of the artist emerges from the complementary gifts of talent and inspiration. Hyde then locates this artistic creation in the context of Mauss’ gift economy, an economy “marked by three related obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to accept, and the obligation to reciprocate” (p.159). Operating within a gift economy, the artist maintains both an obligation to accept his gifts of talent and inspiration and an obligation to reciprocate, for “whatever we have been given is supposed to be given away, not kept” (p.235). But the artist does not reciprocate by offering a gift back to his own talent or back to his Muse, for “it is better if the gift is not returned but is given instead to some new, third party” (p.235). The artist then gives “the gift” he has received to the “new, third party” of the world through creation. The creation of the artist, Hyde argues, must be received as a gift. Hyde writes:

It is the assumption of this book that a work of art is a gift, not a commodity. Or, to state the modern case with more precision, that works of art exist simultaneously in two “economies,” a market economy and a gift economy. Only one of these is essential,

however: a work of art can survive without the market, but where there is no gift there is no art. (p.99-100)

Hyde explains that while works of art exist simultaneously in both the market and gift economies, it is the manner in which they are received that determines whether they become gifts or commodities: “a gift that cannot be given away ceases to be a gift...the spirit of a gift is kept alive by its constant donation...where gifts have no public currency, therefore, where the gift as a form of property is neither recognized nor honored, our inner gifts will find themselves excluded from the very commerce which is their nourishment” (p.145). The “commerce” of the gift economy depends on the gift’s “constant donation;” a work of art cannot be hoarded as a purchased commodity but must be passed on. Only when a work of art circulates can its “inner gifts” endure. Hyde contends that we feel this movement of the gift, this inherent momentum, when a work of art “revives the soul, or delights the senses, or offers courage for living;” unsurprisingly in these instances, we often say that a work of art has “moved” us (p.113).

Further distinguishing the work of art as commodity from the work of art as gift, we find that the gifted work of art establishes bonds among those who are part of its circulation. Hyde writes: “It is the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection” (p.1223). The circulation of gifts gives rise to a community bound through mutual obligation whereas a market economy, with its reliance on singular exchanges of equivalence, leaves its members free and unfettered. Yet these emotional ties, Hyde clarifies, become precisely the point of the gift, for “gifts bespeak relationship” and a group might “derive[] its cohesion from a circulation of gifts” (p.1467, 1580). The transmutation of those gifts into commodities, Hyde warns, “will have the effect of fragmenting the group, or even destroying it” (p.1580). Hyde thus gestures towards the destruction of both the inner gifts of artists and the

delicate network of society as a whole (bound through the circulation of cultural gifts) should works of art be received solely as commodities.

Mark Osteen (2002) critiques Hyde for his dichotomization of gifts and commodities, reminding us that:

These descriptions are not, of course, neutral; rather, in both Left and Right theory, in Mauss as well as in Marx, the commodity is treated as the sign of a fall from grace, a demonic phenomenon emerging horns intact from capitalism's drive toward total commodification. (p.229)

Osteen dismisses Hyde's view of art as gift as "somewhat romanticized and one dimensional," given his refusal to acknowledge the "legitimate domination" (Bourdieu, 1980, explicated in more detail in the next chapter) wrought by the gift (p.28). And in Hyde's effort to demonize the commodity, Osteen continues, Hyde ignores the way in which the market economy has functioned to preserve works of art:

In the case of, say, literary manuscripts, commodity-value encourages preservation which often, in turn, enhances the manuscripts' aesthetic value by encouraging continued scholarly access, if not attention. In short, commodification is not necessarily at odds with 'culture'. (p.230)

So while Hyde posits that commodification destroys the work of art and, by extension, culture as a whole, Osteen argues the opposite: that commodification, in fact, is what sustains culture. Yet despite Osteen's critique, I find Hyde's argument for the need to receive a work of art as gift compelling for its more implicit cultural ramifications. For by positioning the artist's creation within a gift economy, Hyde suggests not only how a culture might sustain its extant works of art but also how it might grow—how existing works of art might give rise to new works of art.

In many ways, Hyde anticipates the Read/Write culture that Lessig (2008) describes, for if we view Lessig's "readers" as artists, then we find that these artists "read" existing works of art in order to "write" their own. Or, in the context of the gift economy, they receive the gift of

the existing work of art and then have an obligation to pass that work on through a creation—a gift—of their own. When I put on the “glasses” of Hyde’s gift, I began to see the summer institute in the context of the gift economy—to view Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as a gift received and our multimodal performance piece as a creation gifted in return, a way of passing Shelley’s gift on, of keeping *Frankenstein* in motion.

### **Beginning with a Belief in the Marvellous**

During July of 2014, thirteen teachers and thirteen high school students worked side by side in a summer institute entitled *Performance at the Center*. Together, they read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Together, they both immersed themselves in and reflected upon Shelley’s imaginative world through multiple modalities. And together, they, like Dr. Frankenstein, generated and cobbled together seemingly disparate pieces to create. The *Performance at the Center* summer institute was a pilot, an experiment; though I had been through analogous processes, I did not know quite what to expect on my research journey. But as Mary Shelley says, “there [was] a love for the marvellous, a belief in the marvellous...which hurrie[d] me...to the wild sea and unvisited regions I [explored]” (p.20).

## Chapter II

### ASSEMBLING THE BODY (OF LITERATURE)

*Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos;  
the materials must, in the first place, be afforded;  
it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself.*  
-Mary Shelley, Frankenstein

#### **Nothing Comes From Nothing**

Literary critics have long noted the impossibility of “creating out of void,” pointing to the “chaos” of literary history as that which furnishes the “materials afforded” for all writers. Oscar Wilde declares that “the true artist is known by the use he makes of what he annexes, and he annexes everything.” In describing the composition of stories to Haroun in Salman Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, water genie Iff explains:

Nothing comes from nothing, Thiefflet; no story comes from nowhere;  
new stories are born from old—it is the new combinations that make them new. (p.87)

Rushdie gives his readers a literal “sea of stories” to illustrate this point, a sea in which pieces of every story in the world swim and wriggle and break apart and join up with other pieces to create still newer stories. James Joyce makes this recombination more of a conscious decision on the part of the writer in his *Finnegan’s Wake*, naming the process “stolentelling.” Literary critic David Cowart (2012) explains that Joyce reveals through this naming an awareness “that

storytelling always involves theft, that all ‘telling’ is ‘stolen’...in this universal principle of artistic larceny, Joyce defines the dynamics of intertextuality” (p.2).

Cowart argues that this intertextuality, this “stolentelling,” has always been in existence, though writers have worked to disguise it through much of literary history, making it overt only by way of allusion. This impulse to veil literary theft comes from a desire for individuality, a concept of artistic originality Henry Jenkins and Wyn Kelley (2013) view as a product of the Romantic era and a largely Western phenomenon. Jenkins and Kelley contend that “our focus on autonomous creative expression falsifies the actual process by which meaning gets generated and new works get produced” (p.2184). They point to the ancient bards of Homer’s time as storytellers who wove characters and stories already known to their listeners into their own tales, and to the figure of King Arthur as a character developed from an early footnote into the work of *Le Morte d’Artur* within three hundred years. Before the “persistent myths about creative genius and intellectual property that have held sway since the Romantic era,” authors did not feel the burden of autonomous creation (Jenkins & Kelley, 2013, p.2207). Perhaps they did not feel what Harold Bloom (1973) would call “the anxiety of influence.”

Cowart posits that postmodernism, with its emphasis on self-consciousness and self-reflexivity, has allowed writers to acknowledge more openly connections between their own and previous work. And because postmodernism has worked to expose these relationships, Cowart offers his own name for this manifest intertextuality: *literary symbiosis*. He thus puts the concept in biological terms, assigning the original text the title “host text” and the text derived, the title “guest text.” Cowart goes on to outline three distinct types of literary symbiosis: *commensalism*, a process by which the guest text “benefits” at no harm to the host, *mutualism*, in



which both guest and host benefit, and *parasitism*, in which the guest benefits at the expense of the host.

Though the biological framing of intertextuality here and the binary of guest text/host text strike me as somewhat reductive (given the rhizomatic nature of textual relationships), the implicit question throughout this schema emerges as critical: how is meaning in the original text affected by the new text? Cowart's delineation of the three types of literary symbiosis becomes a useful means of evaluating the "worth" of a new text. We might ask: to what extent does this new text illuminate the original text? Andrew Motion (2012) notes our pervasive societal tendency to dismiss the more obvious works of literary symbiosis—prequels, sequels, and the like. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, has given rise to a bevy of "guest texts" to date, from Linda Berdoll's *Mr Darcy Takes a Wife: Pride and Prejudice Continues* to Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Motion explains that these derivative works often feature inferior prose, a lack of tension, and a general silliness. Their ubiquity, he continues, comes out of a longstanding impulse to capitalize upon the commercial success of an original text while not necessarily deepening our understanding of that original in any way (making these "guests" part of Cowart's *commensalism* or even, one might argue, *parasitism*). Yet certain "guest texts" do maintain a *mutualistic* relationship to their "host." Motion points to both Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (inspired by *Hamlet*) and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (a prequel to *Jane Eyre*) as examples of pieces that enable us "to think afresh about characters whose fame can otherwise make them feel inaccessible to new interpretation."

This is precisely what Cowart contends to be the virtue of literary symbiosis: its capacity to make literature itself new. Cowart gives the example of John Gardner's *Grendel* (a reworking

of *Beowulf*); through *Grendel*, Gardner “can show his readers something of the remote reality of a fifth-century Nordic culture at the same time that he contrasts that culture, with its sense of purpose and faith in the heroic ideal, with the effete present-day ethos, for which the nihilistic Grendel is, alas, a plausible spokesman” (p.16). Beyond simply switching the perspective through which the story is told, then, this “guest text” invites readers to examine the relationship between the world of *Beowulf* and their own in ways that the original text, perhaps, was unable to do. Cowart suggests that over time, popular literary texts calcify and become not only impenetrable but uninteresting to readers, yet “by its seeming violation of some known and unsurprising text, literary symbiosis defamiliarizes and compels attention to that text” (p.20).

The new text, he implies, has the potential to revitalize the original text. And, indeed, it is not only the individual original text that must necessarily be affected but the whole body of extant work. As T.S. Eliot (1982) puts it:

The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. (p.37)

Eliot speaks of “conformity” here, implying a reshuffling to again reach stasis, but Cowart gestures towards a revivification and infusion of energy; in prompting a “readjust[ment],” the new works offer opportunities for rejuvenation of the entirety of the “existing order,” becoming “agents of renewal” (Cowart, 2012, p. 26). As storyteller Neil Gaiman declares, “We have the right, and *the obligation*, to tell old stories in our own ways, because they are our stories” (italics added, Bender, 1999, p. xi). Gaiman makes clear our ownership of the literary tradition (Rushdie’s “sea of stories”) here, but even more important, I think, is the implication that this tradition depends upon new work—*our* new work inspired by the old—in order to remain vital.

## **Remix: A New Stance Towards Creativity**

If we accept the thesis that all storytelling is, in some sense, “stolentelling,” then literary symbiosis resides at the heart of all literary creation. Jenkins and Kelley (2013) highlight the need to reveal this basic truth to students, to relieve them of the worry intrinsic in those “most persistent myths about creative genius and intellectual property” (p.2207). Because the digital era, expanding both the availability and malleability of texts, troubles the nature of original authorship, Jenkins and Kelley suggest that students adopt a new stance towards creativity:

We need to help them to understand the growing centrality of remix practices to our contemporary conception of creative expression, and we need to help them to understand how modern remix relates to much older models of authorship. (p. 2207)

The two authors define a “remix” as a new piece composed through the combination of borrowed and original materials. That piece might be written, visual, musical, filmic, a medium exactly the same as that of the original text or entirely different. Jenkins and Kelley explain that a remix begins with an interrogation of the original material, asking: what is this original author trying to say? What historical contexts shape this work? The remix author then moves on to ask: what is the ostensible purpose of my remix? How does my remix augment or change the cultural meaning of the original work? Jenkins and Kelley name four types of remix: a remix of Admiration and Respect (including direct references to the original in homage), of Parody (making fun of the source), of Mimicry (adopting the voice of the text or speaker), and of Challenge (calling into question the ideas inherent in the source).

Regardless of the form and purpose of the remix, however, central to the process of remix creation is revelation through juxtaposition: “remix...involves a creative re-envisioning and repurposing of the original, recognizing hidden potentials in the material that may become clear only when it is juxtaposed with ideas and images borrowed from elsewhere” (Jenkins & Kelley,

2013, p. 2338). And ferreting out those “hidden potentials” requires that students, as potential remix authors, read with an eye and ear for the gaps and silences in text and recognize those as places for elaboration. Umberto Eco (1994) frames this elaboration as “those walks that the writer’s strategy induces the reader to take” (p. 50). Eco describes the way in which authors deliberately slow down their narrative, allowing space for readers to take “inferential walks” in order to anticipate what might come next, to connect the story’s events to their own lives or to their understanding of other stories. Writers actively invite readers to take these “inferential walks,” Eco argues; the readers need only to look for clues within the text.

Wolfgang Iser (1978) might describe this hunt for clues as part of “the game of imagination” played out by author and reader. Iser describes the way in which an author leaves gaps or “blanks” in the text, blanks to be filled imaginatively by the reader:

...whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. Hence the structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text” (p.169)

Readers construct meaning from the text through their filling of and connections among these blanks. It becomes the task of the author to appropriately balance explicit information and textual “blanks.” The reader, meanwhile, must decide to enter into this “game of imagination.” If the author gives away too much information, the reader will become bored but if, on the other hand, there exist too many gaps, the reader will become frustrated; in either case, the reader may abandon the “game.” The onus, therefore, sits squarely on the author. For both Eco and Iser, the author plays an active role in eliciting participation from the reader, inviting the reader to transact with the text. As Sartre states, “Art exists only for and through other people” (quoted in Iser, 1978, p.108).

Yet the text is not simply an empty vessel waiting for the reader to participate, nor is the reader a “tabula rasa” waiting to be imprinted by the text (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.4). Louise Rosenblatt (1978) understands the act of reading as a transaction among author, text, and reader. Without the reader, the text exists merely as “a set or series of signs interpretable as linguistic symbols” (p.12). Rosenblatt explains that the text serves as a “stimulus” calling forth the response of the reader; what the reader makes of his or her response to the text becomes the “poem” (p.11). In any act of reading, then, the reader encounters a given text and creates a “poem,” defined by Rosenblatt as “the experience shaped by the reader under the guidance of the text” (p.12). That “poem” represents the reader’s specific response to the text in that moment in time; were the reader to transact with the same text at a different period in his or her life, a different poem might be produced. We might then conceptualize Jenkins and Kelley’s “remix” as a literalization of Rosenblatt’s “poem”—in capturing the reader’s response to a text at a particular moment in time, the remix encapsulates that reader’s transactional experience. Through this transaction, readers enter into and play within the textual gaps and blanks; “*they* become the borrowers, the classic text a lender of imaginative space” (Jenkins & Kelley, 2013, p. 2640).

### **Remix and the Need for “Disorderly Reading”**

Because the creation of a remix necessitates this borrowing and play within imaginative textual space, the process encourages a non linear form of reading. Readers focus on what most interests them rather than aiming for mastery of a text as a whole. Matthew Brown (2007) distinguishes between *linear* reading (the notion of getting lost in a book) and *collative* reading, a term derived from the practice of early New England clerics who collated passages from various

texts in order to compose their sermons. Brown argues that collative reading adheres more closely to our natural reading processes. He reveals that he himself often reads in fragments and out of order, a “disorderly reading” that “mimics the mind’s generative activity of thought and discovery, those instances where you know something is happening, but you don’t know what it is” (Brown, 2007).

Remix processes encourage collative reading by prompting creators to home in on and compile textual fragments of interest. Because these processes necessitate juxtaposition, they trigger “the mind’s generative activity of thought and discovery” (Brown, 2007). Jenkins and Kelley contend that some authors welcome this selective reading, providing Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* as an example: “From the start, Melville invites students to wander in a world of texts and signs, picking a path that proceeds from their own hearts and minds and encouraging them to embellish the margins with their own designs” (p.2141). As they “embellish the margins,” students take Eco’s “inferential walks,” but Jenkins and Kelley suggest here that those inferential walks might simply be logical extensions of the self determined paths readers must forge anyway through a given text.

Just as remix processes lead students/readers to pick and choose those fragments of interest within a text, so too do they cultivate close reading. Originally introduced to America by the New Critics and dominant throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s, “close reading” grants absolute primacy to “the *text itself*” (Tyson, 2006, p.136). As W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M.K. Beardsley articulate in their 1954 “The Intentional Fallacy”:

A poem can *be only* through its meaning—since its medium is words—yet it is, simply is, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. (p.4)

In this method of literary analysis, the author’s intention does not matter nor does the reader’s response: “How is [the reader] to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in

doing it, then poem itself shows what he was trying to do” (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1954, p.4). The only way for a reader to analyze a text is thus “to carefully examine, or ‘closely read’, all the evidence provided by the language of the text itself...its formal elements” (Tyson, 2006, p.137). Close reading often applies to shorter texts; within longer works, “New Critical readings usually confined themselves to the analysis of some aspect (or aspects) of the work” (Tyson, 2006, p.149). The method therefore requires the kind of selective reading Jenkins and Kelley advocate as an inroad to remixing.

Kylene Beers and Robert Probst (2013) work to revise this original definition of “close reading.” They contend that New Criticism’s narrow focus on the text denies students the opportunity to use their own resources to make meaning; in essence, it denies them the chance to transact with the text. Beers and Probst argue that close reading, instead, “should imply that we bring the text and the reader *close* together” (p.36). Like the New Critics, Beers and Probst believe that close reading involves work with a short passage with an intense focus that will then extend to other parts of the text. They do not limit this work, however, to an examination of the formal features of the passage at hand. Beers and Probst explain: “What we want is to *notice* those elements of the text that are, for example, surprising or confusing or contradictory, so that the we pause and take note, think carefully, reread, analyze—read closely” (p.36). Remix processes demand precisely this kind of reading.

### **Roots of Remix: Imaginative Re-creation, Dependent Authorship and Textual Acquisition**

Though their concept of a “remix” emerges directly from the digital era, Henry Jenkins and Wyn Kelley are certainly not the first to advocate for student authorship out of extant

text. Leslie Stratta, John Dixon and Andrew Wilkinson (1973) refer to the work as “imaginative re-creation,” and deem it “an essential function of novel reading, to imaginatively re-create for oneself the experience of the novelist...to enter into a creative role in relation to the work of fiction” (p.70). They identify several forms of imaginative re-creation--the shift of viewpoint (the original text is written from the perspective of one character, the student writes from the perspective of another), the placement of the story in a modern context, and the translation (individual or collaborative) of the text into radio, television, film or drama form. In all of these re-creations, students must ask themselves questions of interpretation: what is the meaning of the original? How can I/we convey that meaning through this new text? If the re-creation is a translation in form, students must consider: how do these two forms differ? What must I/we retain to remain true to the original? What can I/we excise or alter? The learning, Stratta, Dixon and Wilkinson contend, occurs in these moments of negotiation as the act of re-creation impels students to return to the text again and again (we might say to *read closely*): “it requires creation, not ‘freely’ but according to constraints provided both by the original material and the new form in which it is to appear...[the activity] has an end product and audience in mind” (p.88).

Yet that end product does not seem important to the three authors; Stratta, Dixon and Wilkinson stress that the *product* is often far from perfect and that the *process* of making that final version emerges as much more critical. The value of imaginative re-creation lies in the act of creation—the textual insights garnered, the genre understanding achieved by the students at work—rather than in the end product’s effect on its audience. The concept of “audience,” in fact, becomes a mere rhetorical device, an impetus for creation and not an actual body of people to be reached. Still further reducing imaginative re-creation to a classroom exercise, Stratta, Dixon and Wilkinson assure their readers that “such activities as these are not suggested as



replacing the more usual class work; they are offered to be used at discretion, supplementing or modifying where deemed appropriate” (p.90). Though they gesture towards imaginative re-creation’s power as a way in to rich textual interpretation, these three authors ultimately relegate imaginative re-creation to the sidelines of the classroom—a fun set of “activities.”

Stratta, Dixon, and Wilkinson’s conception of imaginative re-creation would, for the most part, reside at the far left of David Cowart’s (2012) continuum of literary symbiosis. Cowart begins his continuum with translation, the translation of a text from one language to another (an act of literary symbiosis in and of itself, he argues) and then the translation of a text from one genre to another (at the other extreme of the spectrum lie “self begotten texts” which, Cowart acknowledges, do not actually exist). Stratta, Dixon and Wilkinson’s imaginative re-creation functions largely as an act of genre translation. With the exception of shifts in viewpoint and historical context, their recommendations for re-creation cluster around alternate genres—radio plays, film scripts, play scripts. Their term for the process is apt: this is *re-creation*, the attempt to recapitulate the same narrative in another form. This is not to denigrate the learning involved in such work (the interpretive negotiations Stratta, Dixon and Wilkinson note), but theirs emerges as a limited perspective on student authorship out of pre-existing text. Through imaginative re-creation, students remain decidedly *within* the bounds of the original text.

Australian teacher and researcher Peter Adams (1987) presents a version of text-inspired student authorship that begins to push these prescribed boundaries, coining the term *dependent authorship*. Through the addition of an episode or an epilogue, an imaginative reconstruction of a gap (Iser’s “blank”) in the text, or the penning of a character’s dream, students take on the role of the author. In role as author, they utilize the original text as stimulus (recalling Rosenblatt’s

transactional theory) for their own creation. As Adams defines it: “In the most obvious sense, what the student has written is ‘dependent’ upon the original because it cannot stand alone and be self sufficient; it requires a knowledge of the original in order to assume its full significance” (p.121). Etymologically, “dependent” derives from the present participle of the French verb *dependre*-- “to hang down.” So Adams views this kind of authorship as “hanging” from the original material, and, one might infer, even weighing down that text. Adams’ language here— “it cannot stand alone and be self sufficient”—recalls again the biological terminology of David Cowart’s literary symbiosis; once more, we find text-inspired authorship distilled to “host text” and “guest text,” with the latter relying on the former for survival.

Adams becomes the first to study this kind of text-inspired student authorship in his 1986 work *At the Far Reach of Their Capacities: Case Studies of Dependent Authorship*. In a series of four case studies—three boys and one girl—Adams examines his own students’ work with dependent authorship. The research appears to be prompted by Adams’ amazement at the student work produced (and, of course, the title of his study reflects this astonishment); he wants to know how the students generated the writing, what makes the pieces different in quality from their other work, the types of thinking involved in their composing processes, and the learning resulting from this writing. The students’ pieces of dependent authorship appear to be anomalous, revealing a unique depth of understanding about their respective original texts.

While the case study methodology seems appropriate, allowing Adams to delve into each selected student’s process with focus and specificity (particularly given that they were all authoring out of separate texts), Adams’ interview questions tend to be problematic. Because he grounds his questioning in the actual student pieces of dependent authorship and has chosen these students expressly for their work, Adams allows his own interpretation of the writing

pieces to suffuse the interviews. When he speaks with student Andrew about the dream he has written (inspired by *The Slave Dancer*), Andrew has little to say, revealing only: “Sometimes I write the piece, and sometimes something inside me does” (p.35). Adams criticizes Andrew for his inability to interpret his own writing; implicit in this is *why don't you see what I see?* Throughout the case studies, then, Adams appears frustrated by the students’ reticence to analyze and evaluate their own work. When interviewing another student about the production of two different pieces centered on the character of Margaret Fernandez in *A High Wind in Jamaica* (one explaining the character’s sexual transgression and the other re-constructing a gap in the text), Adams essentially asks why the second piece is so much better than the first. Adams poses leading questions to see whether this student maintains the same interpretation that he does.

Confronted with Adams’ subjectivity, the four students cannot articulate their composing processes and often do not want to discuss their writing, so Adams is left only to speculate. He determines that dependent authorship encourages non-discursive modes of thinking: “the reason the detailed planning of ‘poetic’ writing is neither possible nor desirable is that such planning—linear, logical, sequential—is inimical to the kinds of thinking which ‘poetic’ forms of writing make available to the writer” (p.151).<sup>3</sup> James Moffett (1988) might suggest that dependent authorship grants students access to their “inchoate” thought. Conceptualizing all writing as revised “inner speech,” Moffett argues that “what really teaches composition—‘putting together’—is disorder” (p.140). The fragmented, selective reading that dependent authorship requires provides this “disorder” out of which students must discover and clarify their thinking. So, too, does composition out of this disorder necessitate “sustained attention to inner

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<sup>3</sup> Adams thus alludes to the angel Raphael’s distinction between “reason...discursive, or intuitive” (Milton, 1674, V. 487-8).

speech reveal[ing] ideas one did not know one thought, unsuspected connection that illuminate both oneself and the outside objects of one's thought" (Moffett, 1988, p.148). Hence, Andrew's claim that "something inside" wrote his piece of dependent authorship; as Adams observes of his students, "Their writing was a revelation to them, of their capacity to discover and realize meaning through *poetic means of statement*" (Adams, 1987, p.152).

Adams goes on to postulate that to engage in dependent authorship, students must decide what matters to them in a text (selective reading) and then be open to possibility both in the text and in their own thinking. He suggests that the parameters of the original material serve as a force of liberation for students: "dependent authorship reduces the burden of invention and narrows the field of investigation" (p.167).<sup>4</sup> Because it reduces this "burden of invention," dependent authorship appeals to a wider range of students. Adams discusses two students in particular—Sam, who struggles with reading, and Darren, who customarily finds success as a both a reader and writer. Adams (1987) notes:

For both of these students, 'dependent authorship' was the means by which they were able to explore concerns of some significance to them--that is obvious from the seriousness of their work--with an assurance, a depth of penetration and a technical resourcefulness that had not previously been theirs. (p.152)

By opening possibilities within students' own thinking, dependent authorship therefore profoundly affects both their reading and writing processes.

Kathleen Andrasick (1990) would contend that this reverberating effect stems from the way in which text-inspired student authorship frees students from "textual tyranny" (p.118). Too many literature classes, she says, cultivate a reverence for original text, a reverence that often renders these texts impervious to interpretation. Andrasick, like Adams, advocates for student

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<sup>4</sup> We might argue, however, hearkening back to Mary Shelley, that *all* invention is, in some way, "dependent authorship."

authorship out of existing text but her terminology casts the process in an entirely different light. Rather than “dependent authorship,” Andrasick calls the process “textual acquisition.” With this shift in terminology, we suddenly find the student authors in a dominant role; they no longer “hang” on the existing text nor are they “guest[s].” Through textual acquisition, students seize control: “the reader aggressively asserts self over text and claims the text (or a portion of it) for individual use...the text is reshaped, disfigured even, for new purposes” (Andrasick, 1990, p.117). The “disfigure[ment]” of the original text comes from the misreading and misinterpretation that activities of textual acquisition necessarily promote; Andrasick argues that such misreading “clear[s] imaginative space within which students as apprentice critics can work” (p.118). Students take a line or an assertion of the original writer and then riff through narrative, poem, or a form of their choice. In this way, Andrasick’s textual acquisition invites more of a direct critique of the original text than does Adams’ dependent authorship or Stratta, Dixon and Wilkinson’s imaginary re-creation.

And, indeed, Andrasick sees textual acquisition as an entree into critical discourse, a melding of the creative and the critical. When students explore and play within texts imaginatively, they begin to acquire them. This acquisition requires synthesis, and “synthesis—of text, context, and critic—is key to critical discourse” (Andrasick, 1990, p.130). Through textual acquisition, Andrasick states, students hone their aesthetic response to artistic work, gain an appreciation of both product and process, and step into the original text as authors, developing the confidence to experiment and explore (p.132-3). She, like Adams, remarks on the kind of thinking activities of textual acquisition demand. In advocating for such activities, Andrasick warns: “If we regularly dismiss the unusual, the nonlinear, or the intuitive when we solve problems, these fertile intrusions become less and less conscious” (p.133).

Andrasick recalls Moffett here when he discusses that need for “sustained attention” to inner speech in composition. Providing space for these “fertile intrusions” and this “sustained attention,” activities of text-inspired student authorship become crucial in linking creative and critical thought. Far from activities “to be used at discretion, supplementing or modifying where deemed appropriate,” the work of imagination re-creation, dependent authorship, and textual acquisition emerge as fundamental to the development of student literary analysis (Stratta, Dixon, & Wilkinson, 1973, p.90). And if we believe that “nothing comes from nothing,” that all literature is a product of literary symbiosis, then this work not only places the student in the *role* of the original author (as Stratta, Dixon, Wilkinson, Adams, and Andrasick all note) but enables the student to emulate those *processes* through which the original text was generated. This work makes visible the wellspring of creativity: all existing text becomes fodder for new creation.

### **Text-Inspired Creation: A Process of Becoming**

Beyond the opportunity to take on the role of the author, text-inspired creation gives students the chance to step into role as a character. Erick Gordon (2000) recounts his Mockingbird Monologues, an 8th grade English project woven throughout a study of Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Gordon assigns each of his students a separate character from *Mockingbird* and, through an extensive, multi-step preparatory process, guides them in the creation of a character monologue: “the only requirement was that the monologue demonstrate a deep understanding of the character, provide insight for the audience, and be under three minutes long” (p.28). Though this monologue is entirely of the student’s design, Lee’s original text “not only provides the students with a repertoire of resources upon which to draw, but just as importantly, it provides a powerful set of constraints to be observed” (Adams, 1987,

p.121). Gordon grants the students imaginative freedom, then, while simultaneously requiring a close reading of Lee's text.

Gordon attributes the impetus of the project to a desire to teach for empathy. In response to what he sees as students' "surface responses to literature," and a tendency to view characters in simplistic binaries (good or evil, heroic or unheroic), Gordon crafts the *Mockingbird* Monologues to complicate their understandings (p.9). By asking each student to write and perform in the role of a character, Gordon leads his classes to investigate and uncover those motivations and challenges, that character history and context not necessarily given voice in the original text. Gordon writes, "I wanted to facilitate a process of *becoming*--a place where students' lives would become so closely tied to a character that oversimplification would be impossible" (p.9-10). He acknowledges that students will never actually *become* their given character, but his goal is to bring student and character as close together as possible.<sup>5</sup>

Eventually, students blur the lines between the character's lives and their own. With this blurring comes an expertise of insight into the character, which allows for a type of student ownership and transformation to take place. (p.10-11)

Jenkins and Kelley (2013), Stratta, Dixon and Wilkinson (1973), Adams (1987), and Andrasick (1990) all credit text-inspired creation with transformation, but theirs is transformation of the original text or transformation of the student's understanding of that original text. What Gordon suggests here is far more radical: the transformation of the student. Gordon does not want students merely to *acquire* the text, but, in some sense, to *become* that text. And in prompting that process of becoming, the work of text-inspired creation, Gordon argues, carries the potential to alter the self.

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<sup>5</sup> This is reminiscent of Beers and Probst's definition of *close reading*—an act that "should imply that we bring the text and the reader *close* together" (2013, p.36).

Gordon thus adds another layer to the rationale behind text-inspired creation with his focus on empathy and student transformation. And this focus aligns with his unique approach to the work; requiring his students both to write *and* perform their monologues, Gordon invites drama into the work of text-inspired student authorship. As *Mockingbird* character Atticus Finch tells Scout, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view [...] until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (Lee, 1960, p.85-87). In order to begin the process of becoming, Gordon has students answer a lengthy series of character questions—*what family member is your character closest to? What does your character do when he/she is alone?* These are the very same questions any actor would ask of his or her character. Once the students have drafted the monologues, they must read them aloud to the class; this is no silent workshop exchange of writing.

At every juncture, Gordon nudges his students both to “consider things” from their character’s point of view, imaginatively extending the bounds of the original text, *and* to “climb into [their character’s] skin and walk around in it.” Gordon becomes singular among those who write about text-inspired creation in his determination to help students embody their pieces. The *Mockingbird* Monologues present a physical, visceral form of Andrasick’s (1990) “textual acquisition.” In so doing, the project suggests the potency of drama as a way into text-inspired creation. *Process drama* in particular emerges as a natural partner for this imaginative work.

### **Process Drama: The Natural Partner**

As process drama pioneer Cecily O’Neill tells us:

The phrase process drama seems to have arisen almost simultaneously in Australia and North America in the late 1980s as an attempt to distinguish this particular dramatic approach from less complex and ambitious improvised activities and to locate it in a wider dramatic and theatrical context. (1995, p.xv)



In *process* drama, students spend significant time co-creating an imagined situation through improvisation and role play.<sup>6</sup> The emphasis rests on drama as method or means to understand a subject rather than drama itself as subject; *process* drama can be used to understand any subject in the classroom (Neelands, 2008). Jonathan Neelands, in his “Drama: the Subject that Dare Not Speak its Name” (2008), notes that “battle lines are often drawn between so called ‘product’ and ‘process’ approaches to teaching drama” (p.4). The former focuses on a study of an established canon of plays and the honing of those skills needed to appreciate them (both as literary and performance pieces). The latter, “at its heart...[rests on] the idea that students learn through the direct experience of working within a fictional drama context, which is not observed by an audience” (Neelands, 2008, p.5).

Arranged in a series of episodes, process drama proceeds from a pre-text. This pre-text might be a myth or a legend, a historical or current event. In one example, O’Neill shares the story of *The Seal Wife* with students, an Irish folktale in which a woman becomes trapped on land when a young fisherman steals her seal’s skin (Taylor, 2000). Compelled to marry him and bear his children, she returns to the sea when her children find the skin many years later. *The Seal Wife* raises immediate questions for the listeners: *why did the fisherman steal her skin? What was the family’s life like while she was on land? How did they react when she returned to the sea?* The pre-text therefore must contain “the seeds of inquiry,” launching students into the drama as it “hints at previous events and foreshadows future occurrences” (Taylor, 2000, p.28; Taylor & Warner, 2006, p.7). It defines the fictional world while also

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<sup>6</sup> Process drama traces its roots to Dorothy Heathcote. Perhaps one of the most influential leaders in drama education, British teacher Dorothy Heathcote grounds her methodology in the idea of drama as the work of an ensemble role play. Emerging as a teacher educator in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Heathcote demanded that the group—rather than the individual—be at the center of drama. She defines educational drama as “role-taking” and articulates the goal of said drama “to understand a social situation more thoroughly or to experience imaginatively via identification in social situations” (Heathcote, 1984, p.49).

providing implicit roles for participants. Through the delivery of the pre-text, the classroom world transforms into the fictional world.

O'Neill embraces classic texts as pre-text, pointing to the way in which Stoppard reworks *Hamlet* in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Leonard Bernstein reworks *Romeo and Juliet* in his *West Side Story*. Harkening back to James Joyce's "stolentelling," O'Neill writes, "Creative and inventive playwrights do not prize personal invention, but often choose instead to transmit their meanings through preexisting patterns...they can be revisited in process drama where they support the explorations of the participants as they create and encounter archetypal roles and relationships" (1995, p.33). Phillip Taylor and Christine Warner (2006), in their examination of O'Neill's work, emphasize the suitability of literature as pre-text:

The parameters of the drama are defined by the text...but the students also bring their own abilities, experiences and insights to the task of exploring, developing and articulating an imagined world where text and drama mingle and interpenetrate. Drama fosters the retelling, extension, elaboration or enactment of events in the original text, as well as the exploration of individual characters; motives and behavior. (p.93)

Process drama fosters the very activities—textual “extension, elaboration”—text-inspired student authorship requires.

O'Neill (1995) identifies several elements fundamental to a process drama: its creation of a fictional world, its foundation in a pre-text rather than a script or scenario, its construction of a series of episodes over time (allowing for elaboration), and its involvement of the whole group with no external audience. She stresses the need to structure the episodes in a “nonlinear and discontinuous” manner, warning that linearity leads all too quickly to reductive, plodding retelling of the story at hand (1995, p.xvii). In such a way, O'Neill encourages the “disorderly reading” that Jenkins and Kelley (2013) recommend for the creation of textual remixes and the

nondiscursive thinking that Adams (1986) finds to be so central in the poetic composition of dependent authorship.

So, too, does O’Neill differentiate here between explanatory and exploratory drama, drawing parallels to Rosenblatt’s (1938) efferent versus aesthetic reading. In explanatory drama (the efferent reading of a text), participants seek to *re-present* a given narrative (this seems aligned with Stratta, Dixon and Wilkinson’s *imaginative re-creation*). In exploratory drama (the aesthetic reading), by contrast, participants work with and through questions intrinsic in the original narrative; O’Neill declares that the pre-text must be *transformed* through the process drama. As she describes a group of college students working in this way with *The Trojan Women* as pre-text, O’Neill observes that “in this work, the students were becoming not merely consumers but *producers* of text” (1995, p.44). What she describes is engagement in text-inspired student authorship, a transformation of both text and self. And, as Taylor and Warner (2006) argue, “Since literary works themselves are indeterminate, the exploration of the possibilities of a story’s meanings may be best accomplished through ongoing dialogue, movement, and play rather than through static interpretations” (p.92). Process drama becomes a way of ‘close reading on one’s feet’ (LoMonico, 2005). Episodic in structure, it functions to destabilize the text, opening spaces for participant creation.

O’Neill’s separation of the explanatory and the exploratory thus not only deepens our understanding of process drama but also becomes a means to better evaluate and more deliberately cultivate text-inspired creation. Jenkins and Kelley (2013) tell us that “as a general rule, a remix is valuable if it is generative and meaningful rather than arbitrary and superficial” (p.2241). But what does it mean for a remix to be “generative and meaningful?” O’Neill suggests that we examine the extent to which that piece *explores* the original text, probing its

gaps and silences, answering questions raised and uncovering new issues for consideration. The process drama and, by extension, the piece of text-inspired creation, must open the original text to interpretation.

For some students, struggles in reading block access to the original text, making any kind of student creation out of that text impracticable. Jeffrey Wilhelm, in his 1997 *You Gotta BE the Book*, clarifies the theoretical relationship between drama and reading. Wilhelm notices among his seventh grade students that there is a significant gap between his stronger, more engaged readers and those more reluctant to read. Starting with Rosenblatt's transactional theory (1978), Wilhelm asks: "How [can] I help the rest of my students think of reading as something that require[s] the creation of meanings that [are] not completely on the printed page? How [can] I help them use words to create characters and pictures that [go] beyond words?" (1997, p.88-89)

Wilhelm's research suggests that drama is the answer. Through a combination of *story theatre* (using the text as a script) and *story drama* (using the text as a starting point, an approach derived from process drama), Wilhelm helps his students to enter into their reading. In story drama, exploring character motivations and hidden scenes, students begin to fill in the textual gaps, an act requisite for textual understanding according to Wolfgang Iser (1978). Pointing to Jerome Bruner's distinction (1986) between the "landscape of action" (events of a story) and the "landscape of consciousness" (the possibilities embedded in the story), Wilhelm contends that dramatic activities enable students to access that landscape of consciousness and, in so doing, to make meaning as readers: "this ability to enter a particular story was sustained through succeeding chapter involving the characters without further reenactments and through rereadings not accompanied by drama" (1998, p.101). Drama serves as entry point. Wilhelm's student

Libby declares, “Writing and reading is easier if you are a character...it’s harder to write if you’re not somebody...you should let us do more of that” (1998, p.104).

And this opening of imaginative space, indeed this textual interpretation, cannot happen in isolation. The association of drama with text-inspired student authorship suddenly illuminates the power of co-creation. Jeffrey Wilhelm joins Brian Edmiston (1998) to discuss this co-creation as a core principle of drama in education: “meanings are created in interaction, carefully created images engage and show ideas...drama contains the seed of classroom democracy” (p.xxiv). Through drama, both students and teachers must remain open to various ideas and perspectives; “people socially construct understandings through joint productive activities...in fact all complex meanings are actively and continually created with others” (Wilhelm & Edmiston, 1998, p.18). Wilhelm and Edmiston draw here on the Vygotsky (1962) principle that “learning proceeds from the group to the individual” (1998, p.43). Bringing drama into the work of text-inspired creation underscores the importance of collaborative meaning-making. Any form of literary symbiosis necessitates an understanding of the original text and the imaginative possibilities therein; co-constructed drama facilitates this understanding.

Cecily O’Neill argues that process drama should never be burdened by the expectation of performance: “when the spontaneous experience is not subverted by pressures of audience, end-product, or limited instrumental demands, it becomes possible for it to evolve into a significant dramatic event” (1995, p.13). Yet I would contend that if the process drama serves as a means to generate material for a performance (rather than being a performance itself), it might suffer no such constraint. It might act as an incubator for ideas, a safe environment for experimentation free from the judgment of external eyes. Within this safe environment, student writing might burgeon, inspired by the improvisations spontaneously enacted (Yaffe, 1989). It could still be a

“significant dramatic event” if the focus was not on creating an “end-product” but simply on creating. And how might these creations be shared? Through performance.

But, again, this performance need not be the “end-product” to which O’Neill is so averse. When Jenkins and Kelley (2013) propose that students remix texts, they contextualize that remixing within a “participatory culture.” They posit that the digital era has given rise to a generation reading “with a mouse in hand,” poised to respond to what they read and then share those responses with the world via the internet. Those responses then become new text to be consumed and “remixed,” all—at best—in service of deepening and complexifying understandings of the original text. While I agree that the digital era has expanded our capacity for the dissemination of textual response, I question Jenkins and Kelley’s implication that this “participatory culture” is new; we have always responded to text in the context of communities in some way (through letters, book groups, classes). What becomes important here, though, is Jenkins and Kelley’s reminder that student response to text must be shared with others and must work to extend original understandings; what if we considered a performance to be just that? Performance would become not an end product, but a beginning. A start to a new conversation.

If we view the performance born of process drama in this way, we must reconceptualize our definition of the text-inspired creation comprising it. Literary symbiosis, imaginative re-creation, dependent authorship, textual acquisition, even remix—all of these terms have attempted to explain (and justify) this kind of creation on the part of the student creator. But all have been vague or dismissive in explaining the purpose of such creation. We must rename the practice in a way that accounts for the centrality of audience. We must begin to understand this work as a “commentary” on the original text.

Sheridan Blau defines the commentary as a “contribution to a literary discussion.”<sup>7</sup> In his 2010 article “Academic Writing as Participation: Writing Your Way In,” Blau points to the disjunction between academia and the typical writing classroom. In the former, experts speak with authority about subjects they know intimately to an audience of readers they know personally; in the latter, students speak with trepidation (often under the guise of feigned authority) about subjects they know superficially to an audience of readers they can barely imagine. Blau offers the writing of commentaries as a means for students to enter into a real academic community (the classroom) and thereby master an academic discourse (Lave & Wenger’s situated learning, 1991).

Because he positions the commentary as a genre to be collaboratively defined within the classroom, Blau presents academic discourse as situational rather than genre-specific. The classroom might admit any number of pre-existing forms (monologues, letters, raps, third person narratives) under the umbrella of the commentary as long as each piece makes a “contribution” to the literary discussion. And if it makes this contribution, why not multimodal performance as commentary? If we understand text-inspired creation through performance as a “commentary,” then it suddenly has manifest purpose: it is offered to the community (a community well versed in the original text at hand) as a catalyst for conversation. Lewis Hyde (1982) might even say that this text-inspired creation is offered to the community as a *gift*.

### **The Gift of Text-Inspired Creation**

Originally published in 1924, Marcel Mauss’ concise *Essai sur le don* (in English, *The Gift: Forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies*) becomes “without doubt the text that

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<sup>7</sup> Blau articulates this definition aloud in a workshop with English Education masters students at Teachers College, February 12, 2014.

initiates the modern reflections on gifts and gift giving” (Schrift, 1997, p.173). In an ethnographic study encompassing Polynesia, Melanesia, and North-west America, Mauss sets out to establish a “set of more or less archaeological conclusions on the nature of human transactions in the societies which surround us and those which immediately preceded ours, and whose exchange institutions differ from our own” (1966, p.144). Mauss notes that in these archaic societies, transactions do not occur among individuals but, rather, among groups. These groups exchange things of economic value (goods, wealth, personal property) but also exchange “courtesies, entertainments, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances and feasts” (p.175). Economic transaction or “the market” thus becomes just “one part of a wide and enduring contract” (p.176). Many of the transactions that comprise this contract take the form of gifts, seemingly voluntary. The giver presents a gift freely, generously, without any thought of return. But Mauss observes that these gifts “are in fact obligatory and interested;” there exist unspoken, understood expectations (p.144). Mauss asks:

In primitive or archaic types of society what is the principle whereby the gift received has to be repaid? What force is there in the thing given which compels the recipient to make a return? (p.144)

Though Mauss begins with an investigation of this obligation to repay a gift received, in his fieldwork he uncovers two equally critical related obligations: the obligation to give gifts and the obligation to receive gifts. Mauss observes among Polynesian clans in particular that “to refuse to give, or to fail to invite is—like refusing to accept—the equivalent of a declaration of war” (p.295). But to return to that motivating question of the obligation to repay a gift: Mauss finds that this obligation resides in the spirit of the gift, or the *hau*. As Mauss writes:

...one gives away what is in reality a part of one’s nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone’s spiritual essence...the thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified, and strives to bring to its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place. (p.294-5)



When one presents a gift, the gift contains that donor's *hau*, his spirit. Pulsing with this spirit, the gift passes from the initial recipient to a third person. The third person presents a gift in return and, Mauss explains, this return gift contains the *hau*, the spirit, of the original donor; it is part of that original gift exchange. So that initial recipient must present this return gift to the original donor for it contains his *hau*; "that seems to be the motivating force behind the obligatory circulation of wealth, tribute and gifts in Samoa and New Zealand," Mauss concludes (p.281).

Beyond being the motivation for the circulation of gifts, the *hau* "gives the donor a mystic and dangerous hold over the recipient" (Sahlins, 1972, p.150). As soon as the donor gives a gift, the recipient is in his debt, and haste in repaying that debt, Pierre Bourdieu (1980) cautions, is seen as ingratitude. "The gift," Bourdieu explains, "is expressed in the language of obligation...it is obligatory, it creates obligations, it obliges; it sets up legitimate domination" (Schrift, 1997, p.5399). So this lag time between when a donor gives an initial gift and when he receives a counter-gift creates the illusion that the counter-gift is voluntary when it is, in fact, given under obligation. And this illusion of freedom on the part of the counter-gift-givers becomes just one piece of what Bourdieu terms the "individual and collective self-deception" of the gift; the other piece of the deception resides in the motivation for giving on the part of the initial gift-giver (p.5313). Bourdieu writes:

...the gift as a generous act is only possible for social agents who have acquired--in social universes in which they are expected, recognized, and rewarded--generous dispositions adjusted to the objective structures of an economy capable of providing rewards (not only in the form of counter-gifts) and recognition, in other words a market, if such an apparently reductive term is permitted. (Schrift, 1997, p.5319)

The gift economy, Bourdieu contends, provides rewards in the form of "symbolic capital," a capital of "recognition, honor, nobility" (p.5362). Bourdieu explains: "At the basis of generous action, the inaugural gift in a series of gifts, there is not the conscious intention...of an isolated

individual but the disposition of habitus, which is generosity...which tends...toward the conservation and increase of symbolic capital” (p.5327). A person presents an inaugural gift in order to gain recognition for his generosity, and the expectation of this recognition, in Bourdieu’s formulation, becomes an expectation of “profit.” “Social agents” develop “generous dispositions” because they have been immersed in “social universes in which they are expected, recognized, and rewarded;” they understand the ways in which they might “profit” from gifting. Bourdieu argues further that when someone has become “attuned to [this] logic of the economy of symbolic goods, generous conduct is not the product of a choice made by free will...it presents itself as ‘the only thing to do’” (p.5324). Individuals do not choose to be generous; when they live within a gift economy, they find that they must be. They must adhere to the set of “collective expectations” (as Marcel Mauss calls them) inherent in gift exchange, and with those “collective expectations,” a gift carries with it “the potentiality of a bond, an obligation” (Bourdieu as quoted in Schrift, 1997, p.5431).

Because “in giving one gives himself (*hau*)...[through gift exchange] everyone spiritually becomes a member of everyone else,” gift exchange necessarily contains that “potentiality of a bond,” creating relationships among donors and recipients (Levi-Strauss, 1997, p.2022). As Mark Osteen (2002) sums up: “Gifts, in other words, are concrete representations of social relations” (p.2). Duran Bell (1991) tells us that this element of the self contained within the gift is, in fact, what distinguishes a gift from a commodity in anthropology. While “a gift implies an intention to develop or maintain a *social relationship* between parties to the exchange,” a commodity carries with it no such obligation (Bell, 1991, p.156). C.A. Gregory (1982), in his *Gifts and Commodities*, suggests that it is this social relationship that places gift exchange in opposition to commodity exchange:

Commodity exchange establishes objective quantitative relationships between the objects transacted, while gift exchange establishes personal qualitative relationships between the subjects transacting” (p.41 as quoted in Schrift, 1997, p.136)

So while transactors can maintain autonomy in a commodity exchange, they cannot escape the dependence intrinsic in a gift exchange. As Mark Osteen (2002) says, “...gifts retain a vestige of inalienability and thereby encourage connection because in some sense they are *never* really passed on, but retain the imprint of the original giver” (p.29). No gift can be “free,” “for the gift serves above all to establish relations, and a relationship with no hope of return (from the individual receiving the gift or his substitute), a one way relationship, disinterested and motiveless, would be no relationship at all” (Godbout & Caille, 1998, p.7).

Osteen (2002) tells us that the rise of “bourgeois individualism” and “industrial (and then post-industrial) economies” has served to further widen the gulf between the gift and the commodity (p.229). Lee Anne Fennell (2002) in her “Unpacking the gift: illiquid goods and empathetic dialogue” goes still further to say that “in Western cultures dominated by market exchange, the gift is a *conceptual misfit*” [italics mine] (p.85). Yet Fennell points out that even in such market-dominated cultures, this “conceptual misfit” endures: “the giving and getting of gifts taps into certain desires that are rarely discussed by scholars...the desire to identify with another; the desire to have one’s true preferences divined by another...the desire to surprise and be surprised” (p.86). During the Western holiday season, for instance, a prospective gift-giver might rush to buy a commodity but then, Fennell observes, carefully remove the price tag, “effectively withdraw[ing] the item from the stream of commerce” (p.89). The gift-giver very deliberately transforms the item from commodity to gift and, in so doing, positions the item as part of a conversation between donor and recipient, a conversation that works to “foster communication and empathy between parties” (Fennell, 2002, p.97). The donor offers a gift and the recipient proffers another gift in exchange in what Fennell terms “a type of game

interaction...with emotional stakes that far transcend the value of the items exchanged” (p.97). In homing in on this concrete instance of Western gift exchange, Fennell therefore suggests the relevance of Mauss’ three related obligations (the obligation to give, to receive and to reciprocate) beyond the realm of “archaic” societies.

Mauss himself, Jacques Godbout and Alain Caille (1998) observe, finds it difficult to see the relevance of the gift in modern societies, beyond these “birthday or Christmas presents, where [the gift is] a marginal vestige of what it had once been” (p.11). Godbout and Caille argue, however, that the gift “does not affect only isolated and discontinuous incidents in social life but social life in its entirety” (p.11). Their *World of the Gift* becomes “an attempt to take Marcel Mauss’ *The Gift* seriously” (p.18). Godbout and Caille declare:

It would, however, be an error to believe that the system of the gift is linked exclusively to traditional and archaic societies and that we can get along without it. The gift is nothing less than the embodiment of the system of interpersonal social relations. To do away with it would be to risk having societies that are radically desocialized and democracies that are meaningless at best. (p.18)

Godbout and Caille acknowledge that modern societies have attempted to distance themselves from the gift, fearing the very “legitimate domination” and intrinsic “obligation” to which Bourdieu refers. Market exchanges dominate and are tit-for-tat, one good or service being immediately repaid with something of equivalent monetary value, thereby dispensing any obligation among parties. The parties themselves remain isolated, alone. There exists no obligation, but there also exists no bond. Yet much as market exchanges predominate, Godbout and Caille insist that the gift pervades modern societies. The problem with previous analyses of the gift (including that of Mauss), the two authors suggest, is the framing of the gift as an economic system; “it is not first and foremost an economic system but [a] social system concerned with personal relationships” (p.15). The gift persists to nourish social bonds.

And so Godbout and Caille focus on the cultivation of those social bonds, drawing on a range of modern examples—from the relationship between parent and child to the donation of organs—to tease out the logic of the gift and to distinguish gifting from a market or commodity exchange. First, they argue that the gift thrives on a lack of equivalence. While a market transaction seeks out equilibrium through the exchange of commensurate goods or services, “equilibrium for the gift is to be found in the tension of the reciprocal debt...that is the motor for the movement of the gift...the gift is in perpetual motion in the social sphere” (p.214). The mark of a strong relationship becomes the extent to which the two parties feel indebted to one another; once either attempts to “balance the books,” the relationship falters, for it is this lack of equivalence that keeps the relationship in motion.

Second, Godbout and Caille point out that this perpetual indebtedness blurs the line between giving and reciprocating; all giving can, in a sense, be seen as reciprocation (Mark Osteen (2002) echoes this when he says, “every gift always repays or responds to some imagined or remembered emotional or material obligation” (p.232)). Even when a gift appears to be unilateral—the gift of an organ, for example, or the gift of volunteer work—with no expectation of return, we can still understand this gift as part of a larger circle of gift-giving (and therefore an act of reciprocation). Volunteers often talk about their desire “to give back,” implying that they give out the obligation born of all they have received. Godbout and Caille remark that “the observer who sees unilateralness in fact only sees one spatial sequence...he isolates two people who in reality are part of a much vaster chain” (p.178). This vast chain only operates to further encourage that lack of equivalence in gifting, for those volunteers do not “give back” to those who have given to them; they direct their generosity towards third parties and do not strive to make their gifts directly proportionate to those they themselves have received. In fact, Godbout

and Caille note a widespread tendency “to give more than we receive” because the giving itself is gratifying (p.181). They describe the way in which parents so often give and give to their children without any thought of return because they see gifting as a voluntary act; they choose to gift, taking pleasure in that choice and “pleasure in the gift is in fact crucial to the gift...it is not an added ingredient...it is tied to freedom, it is proof that there is no constraint, it is confirmation of a social bond” (Godbout & Caille, 1998, p.185). Yet Godbout and Caille contend that the parents, like those volunteer workers, are actually operating within a larger chain of gifting, for they have received the gift of life in the form of their children. Once again, we find a foundational indebtedness blurring the distinction between giving and reciprocating; on some level, these parents feel obliged to give to their children.

So how can the gift be at once obligatory and liberating? Finally, Godbout and Caille explore this seeming hypocrisy of the gift: that the gift obliges with an obligation that can never be formulated, never spoken. In an attempt to mitigate the implicit obligation, a gift-giver says, “Oh, it’s nothing” and the recipient says, “You shouldn’t have.” But the gift-giver expects something in return, and the recipient knows he expects something in return. The recipient knows he must reciprocate. Why the guise, then? Why the game? Godbout and Caille propose that it is this game that helps to distance the gift from a commodified exchange:

...the more convinced I am that the other is not ‘really’ obliged to reciprocate, the more the fact that he does so has value for me, because it means that he is acting out of concern for the relationship, to foster ties between us, that he is doing it for...me. (p.188)

What Bourdieu calls the “individual and collective self-deception” of the gift therefore becomes crucial in cultivating the social bond served by the gift. The lag time between gift and counter-gift makes clear that the two parties do not seek equivalence; they remain comfortable in indebtedness, for the gift has been given to nourish their bond. In the end, Godbout and Caille conclude, “The gift...is a matter not of dominating others or being dominated...but of belonging

to a larger whole, of reestablishing relationship, of becoming a member” (p.220). So people—people archaic, people modern—find belonging in “a larger whole” through the circulation of gifts.

### **Tapping into the Imagination**

Thus far, we have explored the roots of text-inspired creation—its grounding in the literary tradition (*nothing comes from nothing*), its variegated iterations in English education (imaginative re-creation, dependent authorship, textual acquisition, remix), its critical connection to process drama (original text as pre-text for transformation, collaborative meaning-making), its definition as a literary commentary and finally, its potential conceptualization as a gift. We have seen the many angles from which this work has been theorized and yet the paucity of actual studies available probing its enactment in the classroom. An undercurrent throughout this discussion, mentioned obliquely but never fully addressed, has been this work’s most indispensable element: the capacity to imagine. If anything, this is creation dependent not on the original text, but upon the capacity to imagine, the ability to look at an existing text and envisage possibility.

Madeleine Fuchs Holzer (2009) of the Lincoln Center Institute (LCI) contends that “you must learn to imagine before you can create” (p.6). This contention forms the premise of LCI’s work with imaginative learning through aesthetic education. She acknowledges that LCI owes a debt in their approach to Dewey (1980):

...to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent. They are not the same in the literal sense. But with the perceiver, as with the artist, there must be an ordering of the elements of the whole that is in form, although not in details, the same as the process of organization the creator of the work consciously experienced. Without an act or recreation, the object is not perceived as a work of art. The artist selected,

simplified, clarified, abridged and condensed according to his interest. The beholder must go through these operations according to his point of view and interest. (p.4)

Inspired by Dewey, the LCI approach works to replicate the experience of the artist—to engage students in an act of creation analogous to the one they are about to encounter (students participate in this act of creation prior to experiencing the work of the artist). Because they have gone through the process of making similar artistic choices, students are able to recognize artistic decisions *as* decisions when they see or hear the work of art for the first time; they understand what the artist chose to *do*, but also what the artist chose *not to do*. They understand the range of possibilities available and that the work of art represents just one set of decisions. In much the same way, students “must learn to imagine before [they] can create” literary commentaries. Through process drama, they must learn to break open the extant text and mine the myriad possibilities inherent within. Only then can they start to co-create literary commentaries of the imagination.

And when students learn to see text as a set of choices, begin to notice the deliberate silences and the potential for alternatives, they have tapped into the imagination. Maxine Greene tells us:

To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished...to carve out new orders of experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet. And the same person may, at the same time, remain in touch with what presumably is. (Greene 1995, p. 19)

So this work is not simply about preparing students to contribute to a participatory culture, but to shape that culture through their participation, “to carve out new orders of experience.” But they can only do so if they enter into text—the text of literature, the text of the world (Freire, 1987)—on “the plane of the imagination” for “far too seldom are such young people looked upon as



beings capable of imagining, of choosing, and of acting from their own vantage points of perceived possibility” (Greene, 1995, p.41). Only when students can conceptualize a given text as something malleable, something porous, something they have the ability to change and augment, can students like Ty find a reason to read.

## Chapter III

### STRUCTURING THE EXPERIMENT

#### **Research Site**

The inaugural *Performance at the Center* summer institute took place from July 7 to July 23, 2014 at Teachers College, Columbia University. Beginning at 9am on the morning of Monday, July 7, thirteen high school students from around New York City joined thirteen teachers (elementary, middle and high school) from around the world to co-create a multimodal performance piece inspired by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Both groups—students and teachers—had been selected by application. All of the students selected (with the exception of one) had a previous connection to one or more adults involved in the institute: several were former students of the facilitators and a few were students of the teachers chosen to participate. For students, participation in the summer institute was free, funded through external donations and contingent upon a signed letter of commitment (students promised to be present for the entirety of the program). For teachers, the program was a fellowship; teachers received a \$1000 stipend for participation. We had recruited teachers through both national and international networks: three arrived from outside of the country (Australia, Singapore and Taiwan), and five from outside of the state (California, Washington, Utah, Ohio, Pennsylvania). Joining me on the facilitation team were three co-facilitators: John, Allan, and Max (each facilitator will be described later in this chapter).

For the first two weeks (from July 7 through July 18), students and teachers (to be referenced from here on as *players*) and facilitators met daily from 9am to 4pm Monday through Friday with the interim weekend free. Over the course of these two weeks, players experienced the following schedule:

<u>Monday, July 7, Day 1</u>  MORNING: Introductions, Identification of big questions, Teaching artist-led introduction to remix  AFTERNOON: Teaching artist-led movement workshop	<u>Tuesday, July 8, Day 2</u>  MORNING: Mining the <i>Frankenstein</i> journals; identification of hotspots  AFTERNOON: Teaching artist-led improvisation workshop	<u>Wednesday, July 9, Day 3</u>  MORNING: Teaching artist-led vocal workshop  AFTERNOON: Teaching artist-led soundscape workshop	<u>Thursday, July 10, Day 4</u>  MORNING: Facilitator-led hidden voice monologue workshop  AFTERNOON: Creation relays	<u>Friday, July 11, Day 5</u>  MORNING: Teaching artist-led movement workshop  AFTERNOON: Creation relays
<u>Monday, July 14, Day 6</u>  MORNING: Teaching artist-led process drama workshop  AFTERNOON: Sequencing of the final performance piece	<u>Tuesday, July 15, Day 7</u>  MORNING: Rehearsals for Groups A&B  AFTERNOON: Rehearsals for Groups C&D	<u>Wednesday, July 16, Day 8</u>  MORNING: Rehearsals for Groups A&B  AFTERNOON: Rehearsals for Groups C&D	<u>Thursday, July 17, Day 9</u>  MORNING: Technical Rehearsal: Full Performance  AFTERNOON: Final Dress Rehearsal: Full Performance  EVENING: Final Performance	<u>Friday, July 18, Day 10</u>  MORNING: Reflections (in writing and discussion)  AFTERNOON: Reflections continued

Figure 1. Performance at the Center Summer Institute Schedule

The emphasis during the first six days (Monday, July 7 through Monday, July 14) was on the generation of as much potential material for the final performance piece as possible. All of the workshops (both teaching artist-led and facilitator-led) were designed to engage players in Shelley’s text through a range of modes and to guide players in beginning to create in response

to their own questions about the text through those modes. The “creation relays” on Days 4 and 5 and Friday, July 11 were opportunities for the players to work in groups to create—within a limited amount of time—multimodal pieces in response to “hotspots” identified in the text on Day 2 (we defined “hotspots” as those parts of Shelley’s text rife with ambiguity and gaps). The purpose of the teaching artist-led and facilitator-led workshops was therefore twofold: first, to develop pieces that might wend their way into the final performance and second, to offer tools (movement structures, exposure to audio software, process drama structures) that players might employ in those creation relays. Days 1 through 6 allowed players “space in which to fool around, to have fun, to aim in one direction and hit a target in another...to learn not to force [production] but to let [creativity] build within them so [they] may have the freedom of saying what their brains did not expect them to say” (Murray, 1984, p.5).

On the afternoon of Day 6, at the start of the second week, players sifted through the rich “literary compost” accumulated in the week previous and culled pieces to begin co-crafting a performance (Murray, 1984, p.3). By the morning of Day 7, the players had a basic outline for their performance. We facilitators divided the performance into four parts (A, B, C and D), and assigned each player to two groups: A or B and C or D. In this way, we could rehearse the show with efficacy: in the morning, group A might rehearse in our classroom upstairs while group B rehearsed in our performance space downstairs and in the afternoon, group C might rehearse downstairs while group D rehearsed upstairs. On both Days 7 and 8, we were thus able to rehearse the entirety of the performance. On the evening of Day 9, players presented their performance to a public audience of roughly two hundred people followed by an audience talk-back in which questions raised by the production were discussed. Day 10, the final day with both student and teacher players, featured collective spoken and written reflection on the process

throughout. Players worked together to distill principles of practice gleaned from their time together and brainstormed how elements of the summer institute might be carried back to their respective schools. Teacher players returned for three days in the week following this day of reflection (Monday, July 21 through Wednesday, July 23) to craft curriculum materials for their own classrooms (to be implemented in the fall semester of AY 2014-2015).

### **The Need for Narrative**

*A qualitative narrative approach from a teacher researcher stance* was most appropriate for this study as I was interested in how my program co-facilitators and I, student and teacher players understood and articulated the process of text-inspired creation. As a teacher researcher, I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (1993) describe teacher research as “systematic and intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work” (Klehr, 2012, p.123-4). Working to envision this project from its very inception, I consider *Performance at the Center* to be my “own school” and my “classroom work.” I at once served as a facilitator and researcher within the summer institute, my “...theory and practice (or practice and research)...not viewed as separate entities or dichotomies... [but]two sides of the same thing, which is always in reflexive interplay, revision, and formation” (May, 1993, p.116). Researching as a teacher, I was “working from the inside,” using my professional context as a site for study and blurring the boundaries between inquiry and practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.41).

Philip Taylor (1998) describes such teacher research as *action research*, a study “in which the teacher is the principal instrument through which data is collected, analyzed, and presented” (p.216). As defined by the work of Kurt Lewin (1946), action research emerges as “a cyclical model of action and reflection,” instructional planning followed by execution followed

by reflection followed by yet more planning (Klehr, 2012, p.123). But this model of research, Taylor argues, leaves little room for the reflection that occurs in the moment of action—the instructional adjustments that take place as a result of issues that crop up in the moment of teaching: “These unpredictable situations, or what Schon (1983, 1987) characterizes as his indeterminate zones of practice, cannot be satisfactorily dealt with by recourse to the manual, the handbook, or other technocratic sources...they have to be dealt with immediately” (Taylor, 1998, p.216). Taylor therefore calls for more studies in which teachers reflect *in action*; I entered into this research study as a co-facilitator who would “jointly plan, implement, and reflect in and on the work...[a] reflective contract [that] requires the release of an expertise and the development of the capacity to engage, to learn, to understand” (p.225). As such, I define this study as what Taylor terms *reflective-practitioner research*, distinct from *action research* in that the goal is not to teach others as much as it is to inform myself (and, by extension, my co-facilitators).

Elliot Eisner (1998) identifies six fundamental features of a qualitative study. First, such a study must be “field-focused”: “it tends to study situations and objects intact...on the whole...qualitative researchers observe, interview, record, describe, interpret, and appraise settings as they are” (Eisner, 1998, p.33). I entered the *Performance at the Center* summer institute intent on studying the situation “intact,” prepared to “observe, interview, record, describe, interpret, and appraise” the institute just as it was. Second, a qualitative study must utilize the “self as an instrument” for research: “the expert knows what to neglect...knowing what to neglect means having a sense for the significant and possessing a framework that makes the search for the significant efficient” (Eisner, 1998, p.34). I, as “the expert” in this particular study, knew what to neglect based upon my chosen research questions; those questions became the framework through which I understood what was “significant” in my data. Third, Eisner

argues that a qualitative study is marked by its “interpretive character”; I, as researcher, sought constantly to explain why what I was observing in the summer institute was taking place. The last three features Eisner describes—the *use of expressive writing*, *attention to particulars*, and *coherence and insight*—are qualities I endeavored to bring to the writing of this study. I attempted to craft the kind of “good qualitative writing helps readers experience the heat—vicariously, of course,” and I made that attempt through *narrative inquiry* (Eisner, 1998, p.38).

Jean D. Clandenin and Michael F. Connelly (2000) tell us that “narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as lived and told in stories” (p.128). As a narrative inquirer, I entered into the documenting of this study determined to capture my own experience through stories. Clandenin and Connelly describe their affinity for narrative research: “For us, life—as we come to it and as it comes to others—is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of times and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (2000, p.17). For me, the experience of the summer institute became a series of narrative fragments, my understanding developing only through their juxtaposition and examination, through that search for “narrative unities and discontinuities.” Elliot Eisner (1997) in *The New Frontier in Qualitative Research Methodology* writes that “narrative, when well crafted, is a spur to the imagination, and through our imaginative participation in the worlds that we create we have a platform for seeing what might be called our ‘actual worlds’ more clearly” (p.264). My hope in approaching this study through narrative was to do just that: to spur the imaginations of my readers and, in so doing, to help both them as readers and myself as writer to see the “actual world” of the summer institute more clearly.

But I gravitated towards narrative as more than a means of clarification. In *On Narrative Inquiry: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research*, David Schaafsma and Ruth Vinz

(2011) write: “we think of narrative as ‘provocateur,’ that is, provoking new thoughts, questions, and possible explanations for the issues and situations we are trying to understand?” (p.9)

Throughout this study, I set out to *provoke* through narrative, to unearth the questions and confusions lurking beneath the surface of the summer institute. And I, like the authors included in Schaafsma and Vinz’s narrative inquiry collection, am “present in these tales as [you] read them—[self] revealed and questioned, vulnerabilities exposed” (2011, p.11). As Clendenin and Connelly (2000) remind us: “Narrative inquiry carries more of a sense of continual reformulation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem definition and solution” (p.124). My narrative inquiry continued to shift and evolve over the course of this study without ever resting on any one problem or any one solution. I therefore entreat my readers to evaluate this study based “not so much [on the] conclusions that [you] come to believe but [on] the number and quality of the questions that the work raises” (Eisner, 1997, p.268).

### **The Potential Bias of the Teacher Researcher**

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) caution against “studying a site or people in whom one has a vested interest,” and they “question research that examines ‘your own backyard—within your own institution or agency, or among friends or colleagues’” (p.21 as quoted in Creswell, 1998, p.117). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) might classify Glesne and Peshkin’s warning as part of an “ethics critique” of teacher research, the critique that “[teachers] inevitably face conflicts of interest that jeopardize the best interests of their students...[which] renders informed consent and freedom from coercion about research participation extremely difficult” (p.47). Cochran-Smith and Lytle go on to delineate two additional critiques of teacher research (research they locate under the umbrella of practitioner inquiry): the “methods critique” and the “political



critique.” A. Michael Huberman (1996) spearheads the “methods critique”: “Just because teachers may have intimate insider information about teaching does not negate the need for them to use rigorous and objective research methods” (as quoted in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.46). Huberman suggests a tendency among teacher researchers to ignore “rigorous and objective research methods” in favor of anecdotal observation. The “political critique,” Cochran-Smith and Lytle explain, is twofold: teacher research is either dismissed as “too benign” or as “advocacy rather than research” (2009, p.47). Yet in response, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) declare: “Most [critiques] are intended to safeguard traditional approaches to knowledge generation and teacher development and preserve the hegemony of outside expertise” (p.47). Only teacher researchers can “work the dialectic,” challenging “the assumed dichotomy between research and practice” and “the assumed disjuncture between the role of the researcher and the role of the practitioner” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.94).

This is not to say that those critiques of teacher research are without merit. I entered into this case study (what Cochran-Smith and Lytle determine to be the primary genre of teacher research) with an acute awareness of the potential problems inherent in my stance. To address the “ethics critique,” I made certain that all of my calls for participants stressed their voluntary nature. Because I was not “grading” these student and teacher players as a traditional teacher might, study participation among the players was not attached to any implicit “incentive” or “disincentive,” but I was nevertheless cognizant of my role as a facilitator (and the extent to which the gap between facilitator and player might frame the call for study participation as subtly coercive). In answer to the “methods critique,” I approached this study grounded in an articulation of “rigorous and objective research methods” (described next in this chapter), returning to these methods again and again over the course of my data collection and

analysis. And finally, in considering the “political critique:” I recognized my tendency to view the work of the summer institute as advocacy—as advocacy for student and teacher collaboration, for the centrality of the arts and the imagination, for embodiment in reading practices. In fact, several of my study participants themselves characterized the work of the summer institute as advocacy. So I knew that I had to avoid reductiveness as I collected and analyzed my data; I had to consciously combat the framing of this summer institute as a victory narrative. But still I believed that “practitioners who are deeply engaged in the work of teaching and learning know something about that work and, collectively with one another and with others...have the capacity to generate and critique knowledge, figure out how to use (or not use) knowledge generated by others, improve practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.125). As a teacher researcher, I sought—first and foremost—to “generate and critique knowledge.”

I collected data from multiple sources (see below) in order to explore the phenomenon of text-inspired creation in this particular context. The qualitative methods outlined below were selected due to the dynamic nature of the context in which this research was conducted. They were an attempt to “try to attend to the nuances...often miss[ed] in the blur of routine practice...to become more conscious of what [we were] thinking and feeling as [we] plan[ned] for and engage[d] in practice, and [paid] closer attention to what students [said] and [did] in class in an effort to understand what sense [players and facilitators] [were] making of their learning” (May, 1993, p.118).

### **Research Questions/ Data Collection**

The research questions below are revisions of those with which I started this study. Upon entering the field, I began a process of *progressive focusing* (Malcolm Parlett and David Hamilton, 1976), modifying my questions in accordance with the data I was gathering.

**My research focused on three questions:**

***1) How do Performance at the Center facilitators set up the conditions for text-inspired creation?***

DATA collected in response to this question:

a) Documents- I collected meeting notes, daily plans (annotated with reflexive memos based on my fieldnotes), email correspondence with teaching artists, and handouts for players.

*(Documents revealed the evolution of instructor plans as the summer institute progressed.)*

b) Interviews- I held two 30-60 minute interviews with two facilitators and three 30-60 minute interviews with one facilitator (the additional interview was at his request, at the close of the first week of the summer institute); one interview prior to the start of the summer institute, one at the end of the summer institute. These interviews took place at an agreed upon location--an office, a classroom, or the library. The interviews were audio-recorded. (see Appendix A for interview questions)

*(Semi structured interviews provided opportunities to probe the instructors' rationale for their plans.)*

c) Participant Observation- I took fieldnotes each day on what I observed about the way in which facilitators set up the conditions for text-inspired creation. This notes included observations on the following:

-Ways in which facilitators created an atmosphere/ environment in the room

- Verbal and non verbal communication among facilitators and between facilitators and players
- Ways in which facilitators negotiated the dynamics of the combination of student and teacher participants
- Ways in which the facilitators elicited feedback from the participants
- Shifting roles of the facilitators (when participants are working as whole group, working in small groups, working with a guest teaching artist)
- Ways in which the facilitators elaborated upon the work of the participants
- Ways in which the facilitators brought their own creativity into the room
- Ways in which facilitators operated in the space of the room

*(Participant observation provided opportunities to see the negotiation of plans in action.)*

d) Focus Groups- I held three focus groups; one comprised of ten teacher players, two comprised of the same seven student players. The teacher player focus group met for 45 minutes during lunch time on Day 4. The student player focus group met for 45 minutes during lunch on Day 5 and again in the afternoon on Day 10. Each focus group met in a classroom near the summer institute room. These focus groups were audio-recorded. (see Appendix A for focus group questions)

*(Focus Groups provided opportunities to encourage student and teacher player reflection on the ways in which facilitators set up the conditions for text-inspired creation.)*

**2) How do student and teacher players describe what effect, if any, Performance at the Center has on their reading of Frankenstein?**

DATA collected in response to this question:

a) Focus Groups- I held three focus groups; one comprised of ten teacher players, two comprised of the same seven student players. The teacher player focus group met for 45 minutes during lunch time on Day 4. The student player focus group met for 45 minutes during lunch on Day 5 and again in the afternoon on Day 10. Each focus group met in a classroom near the summer institute room. These focus groups were audio-recorded. (see Appendix A for focus group questions) *(Focus Groups provided opportunities to encourage student and teacher player reflection on the relationship between their work with text-inspired creation and their reading of Frankenstein.)*

b) Documents- I collected written reflections from the student and teacher players on Day 10 of the summer institute. *(Documents revealed student and teacher player reflection on the relationship between their work with text-inspired creation and their reading of Frankenstein.)*

**3) How do select teacher players describe what effect, if any, Performance at the Center has had on their design and implementation of curriculum?**

DATA collected in response to this question:

a) Interviews- I held two 30-60 minute interviews with four teacher players; one interview occurred early in the fall (late September/early October) and one interview occurred at the close of the first semester (late December to early

February). These interviews took place at an agreed upon location (coffee shop, the library, a restaurant). (see Appendix A for interview questions)

*(Semi-structured interviews encouraged teacher reflection on the effect, if any, of the summer institute on their curriculum design and implementation.)*

b) Artifacts- I collected curricular artifacts from the teacher players to contextualize data from interviews.

*(Documents revealed teacher thinking about the effect, if any, of the summer institute on curriculum design and contextualize the data from teacher interviews.)*

Research Question	Prior to the beginning of the summer institute (before July 6, 2014)	Week 1 of the summer institute (July 6-July 11, 2014)	Week 2 of the summer institute (July 14-July 18, 2014)	Week 3 of the summer institute (July 21-23, 2014)	Post summer institute (September, 2014-February, 2015)
<i>How do Performance at the Center facilitators set up the conditions for text-inspired creation?</i>	Interview #1 with facilitators (IN I)  Beginning of document collection	Continued collection of documents  Participant Observation  Focus Group with teacher players (TF)  Focus Group #1 with student players (SF I)	Continued collection of documents (WR)  Participant Observation  Focus Group #2 with student players (SF II)	Interview #2 with facilitators (IN II)  Continued collection of documents  Participant Observation	
<i>How do teacher and student players describe what effect, if any, text-inspired creation has on their reading of Frankenstein?</i>		Focus Group with teacher players (TF)  Focus Group #1 with student players (SF I)	Focus Group #2 with student players (SF II)  Collection of written reflections (WR)		

<p><i>How do select teacher players describe what effect, if any, Performance at the Center has had on their design and implementation of curriculum?</i></p>					<p>Interview #1 with teacher players (September-October) (IN I)</p> <p>Interview #2 with teacher players (December-February) (IN II)</p> <p>Collection of documentation (curricular materials)</p>
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Figure 2. Research Schedule

### Data Analysis

Once I assembled my data, I began the process of analysis. Analysis took on four basic stages:

#### Stage 1: Transcription and Annotation

I transcribed all facilitator and teacher interviews and all three focus groups. I then read and re-read each transcript, annotating with research memos as I progressed. The research memos served primarily to a) identify emerging categories b) name connections among the transcripts c) record questions as they arose. For instance, writing in response to the beginning of teacher Liz’s first interview on October 19, 2014 (“Well, the idea of creating a trusting, giving community really stuck with me. So I use the idea of gifting...and I have my kids bring a gift every day. And a lot of them are really great and really beautiful things about themselves”), I wrote:

This relates to Mollie's interview and the establishment of this community. Interesting that the kids are using this as a forum for sharing something about themselves--I wonder if this somehow relates to what Mollie mentioned about kids needing to be seen and the students in the focus group talking about how important it was for everyone to know something about everyone else in the room? (research memo, 10/20/14)

I read through and annotated each transcript at least twice in the course of the analysis process, as the reading of one transcript would often lead me back to a transcript I had previously read and annotated. In the example above, then, I returned both to the transcript of teacher Mollie's first interview and the transcripts of both student focus groups after reading through Liz's transcript to annotate each still further.

### Stage 2: Categorical Aggregation

After combing through and annotating each transcript, I began a process of *categorical aggregation* (the collection of instances from data with the hope of emerging issue-relevant meanings, Stake, 1995), grouping data (in addition to the transcripts, my fieldnotes and the players' final reflections) into general categories. In order to do this, I first separated each piece of data into self contained segments, each segment addressing a central idea. The segments could be a phrase or sentence, or they might be up to a page in length. Two "segments" from facilitator Allan's second interview look like this:

Yeah, I mean I think one of the questions I have for myself too is how much was – not luck, but how much just worked out and how much was in our control. You know what I mean? Because there's a certain magic in the whole experience and it's sort of like how do you create that magic? (ALLAN, IN II) [category: *the unknowing*]

I mean, the biggest one was epitomized by reinforcements on Friday, that the aspect of emotional, psychological, social impact that the institute had on all the players. I have seen and been part of experiences that have had that level of impact before, but nothing had ever took place over the course of two weeks, especially for adults. I guess physics camp was a little bit like that for me, when I was a junior in high school. But after that, those sorts of experiences that have that level of impact have been ones that have taken the course of months and years. So that was really surprising. (ALLAN, IN II) [category: *emotional impact of institute*]

I affixed each segment of data to its own index card and then physically sorted the cards into categories:

- *Role of the facilitator (McLaren's liminal servant, hegemonic overlord, entertainer)*
- *The Unknowing*



- *Invitations*
- *Troubling the divide between the critical and the creative*
  - *creativity as synthesis—necessity for divergent and convergent thinking*
- *Connection to the text (insight into the text through activities)*
- *Nature of performance/ definition of performance*
- *Composing as forming (composing through the body; challenging the divide between body and mind)*
- *The Role of the Muse*
- *Building worlds and wonder*
- *Aesthetics/ Curation of space in cultivation of creativity*

## **PLAYING**

- *What it means to be a player*
- *Joy/ Laughter*
- *Place of sarcasm/ satire*
- *Risk taking*
- *Place of assessment*

## **THE PRIMACY OF COMMUNITY**

- *Learning in Collaboration*
- *Community*
  - *rituals/ routines*
  - *gift giving in creation of community*
- *We all steal*
- *Gift Giving Culture (see above)*
- *Remix*
- *Commons*
- *What happens when gifts aren't received...*
- *Tensions around Ownership*
- *Separating what's useful from what's not*
- *Emotional experience of institute (for both players and facilitators)*
- *This work as advocacy*
- *Transformation*
- *Students as players in the world*
- *Select nature of this experience*

### Stage 3: Finding Patterns

After aggregating the data into general categories, I started to look for *patterns* (correspondence between one or more categories, Stake, 1995):

## **ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR**

- *Role of the facilitator (McLaren's liminal servant, hegemonic overlord, entertainer)*
- *The Unknowing*
- *Invitations*

## **CREATIVE THINKING IS CRITICAL THINKING**

- *Troubling the divide between the critical and the creative*
  - *creativity as synthesis--necessity for divergent and convergent thinking*
- *Connection to the text (insight into the text through activities)*
- *Nature of performance/ definition of performance*
- *Composing as forming (composing through the body; challenging the divide between body and mind)*

## **GIFT GIVING CULTURE**

- *The Role of the Muse*
- *Building worlds and wonder*
- *Aesthetics/ Curation of space in cultivation of creativity*

## **PLAYING**

- *What it means to be a player*
- *Joy/ Laughter*
- *Place of sarcasm/ satire*
- *Risk taking*
- *Place of assessment*

## **THE PRIMACY OF COMMUNITY**

- *Learning in Collaboration*
- *Community*
  - *rituals/ routines*
  - *gift giving in creation of community*
- *We all steal*
- *Gift Giving Culture (see above)*
- *Remix*
- *Commons*

## **TENSIONS IN THIS WORK**

- *What happens when gifts aren't received...*
- *Tensions around Ownership*
- *Separating what's useful from what's not*
- *Emotional experience of institute (for both players and facilitators)*

## **LINGERING EFFECTS**

- *This work as advocacy*
- *Transformation*
- *Students as players in the world*
- *Select nature of this experience*

### Stage 4: The Emergence of the Gift as Lens

As I collapsed categories into patterns, I started to see threads of the gift economy appear again and again. I looked back through all of my data, then, through the lens of the gift economy to

see what might be revealed. For example, in examining the role of the facilitator (specifically the role of facilitator as muse), I wrote:

**Acting as muse**—setting up conditions for wonder and surprise through the journals and ephemera, invitations, curation of the room, creation of an environment in which one wants to engage (facilitator thus “gifts” inspiration to create to players); tension in this role when facilitator wants to be the artist and feels that his gifts are not received by the players

At this stage, I also engaged in a process of *direct interpretation* (focus on a single instance to draw meaning, Stake, 1995) as I searched back through my fieldnotes for instances relevant to the emerging categories and patterns.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is the concept that best matches my paradigm. I improved it by (Maxwell, 2005):

1. Intensive, long-term involvement—As a researcher, I was present in the summer institute for each and every day. This allowed me to observe facilitator and player behavior and hear verbal reactions to the process of text-inspired creation; I was then able to compare those observations to the data I collected in my formal interviews, focus groups and document analysis.
2. Respondent validation—I solicited feedback about data and conclusions drawn from the first round of interviews and focus groups in the second round (in addition to the prompts outlined in the second set of questions for each, see Appendix A).

This validation helped to check my instinct to draw conclusions too rapidly from the data at hand (researcher bias) and assisted in sussing out the extent to which my initial data evidenced reactivity.

3. Triangulation—The same questions were explored in participant observation, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Triangulation helped me to both reduce researcher “bias” (while I may have attempted to see certain results in one data set, this became far more difficult when juxtaposed with additional data sets) and reactivity given the wide range of participants included.

## Participants

### My Co-Facilitators

1. *John*: John is a teacher educator and the former graduate instructor of all three of his co-facilitators. We facilitators maintained an implicit understanding that John was the director of the summer institute and often, especially in the early planning stages, we deferred to him. Impassioned and excitable, John often bounced on his toes as he spoke to the players. Because this was the first iteration of *Performance at the Center*, John spent much of his time promoting the program during those two weeks (dashing out of the room to set up interviews and organize press releases). He would participate when he could and was always present at critical moments (the start of the institute, the final dress rehearsals, the final day of reflection), but John did not serve as a facilitator on a daily basis.
2. *Allan*: Allan is in his eleventh year of teaching and works as an English teacher at a large, arts-based high school. He has had significant experience working with teaching artists in his own classroom and often integrates multimodal projects in his students’ study of literature. That said, he professed that he had never worked on a project as vast in scope as the summer institute within his own classroom. I talked with Allan three days before the summer institute started and then the Saturday following the final performance

(after the student players left but before the three days of curriculum development with the teachers; Allan had to miss those final three days due to a prior commitment). Allan emanates kindness and generosity; in one interview—without any prompting—he described in detail all that he had learned from each of his co-facilitators.

3. *Max*: Max is in his fourth year of teaching and works as an English teacher at a music-based middle and high school. His school is new (adding a grade each year; he taught ninth grade for the first time following our summer together), and so he entered the summer institute particularly interested in how he might build school culture. During the planning conversations preceding the summer institute, Max often questioned the aims of the project in relation to the teaching of literature. He had never been part of a theatrical production before. Even in his first interview on the afternoon before the beginning of the institute, Max expressed doubt and often second-guessed his own opinions (Max himself openly acknowledged his shifting reactions to the work of the summer institute). In addition to this first interview, I spoke with Max two more times: at the end of the first week of the institute (at his request) and at the close of the final day with the teachers.

### Teacher Focus Group

On the first day of the summer institute, I explained my study and asked for teacher volunteers for a Thursday lunchtime focus group. The following teachers volunteered to participate:

1. *Emily*: A teacher with ten years of experience, Emily taught middle school for five years before moving to the elementary level. For much of her career, she has been a Title 1 reading specialist. Though she professes discomfort with the drama of the summer

institute on the very first day, Emily engages fully throughout the three weeks. She is often the teacher player who helps draw out comments from student players.

2. *Ruby*: A teacher entering her third year, Ruby teaches eleventh and twelfth grade AP English classes. She majored in English as an undergraduate but also holds a minor in theatre. Ruby is quick to smile and quick to speak. She often volunteers to share her work and assumes leadership in groups.
3. *Jasmine*: Working outside of the United States, Jasmine has been teaching literature to grades nine through eleven for eight years. She has a sly, surprising sense of humor that suddenly surfaced during the improvisation workshop on Day 2 when she declared herself a “ball crusher.”
4. *Jessica*: A teacher with six years of experience currently teaching tenth grade English and a musical drama elective at an international bilingual school. Jessica has a buoyant energy about her and works easily with the student players.
5. *Autumn*: Just finishing her ninth year of teaching, Autumn began as an elementary school teacher and has been teaching ninth grade English for the past three years at an urban charter school. Autumn has a quiet intensity about her. She mentions her own students often; it is clear that she is thinking about them throughout the summer institute.
6. *Ethan*: A teacher at an all boys private high school outside of the United States (where he also went to school), Ethan has been teaching for two years. He has a background in theatre, so he often takes on a directorial role.
7. *Tovie*: A ninth and twelfth grade English teacher at a public high school on the West Coast, Tovie enters the summer institute with some hesitation. It is clear that she is processing, assessing.

8. *Blythe*: \*

9. *Mollie*: \*

10. *Liz*: \*

\*Please see “Teacher Follow Up Interviewees for a full description.

### Student Focus Group

As with the teacher focus group, I asked for student volunteers following my verbal articulation of the study. The following students volunteered to participate in a Friday lunchtime focus group at the end of our first week together and then again in a focus group on the Friday of our second week together:

1. *Beth*: A student entering her senior year at the large, arts-based, selective high school where Blythe and Allan teach, Beth is a dedicated actress.
2. *Jake*: A student entering the eleventh grade at the same high school. Jake commands attention early on during the summer institute with his mature, charismatic presence.
3. *Alex*: Alex comes from the same high school and is also entering eleventh grade. She often writes down her thoughts before saying them aloud, reading from her journal in large group discussions.
4. *Sophie*: A rising eleventh grader at the same high school, Sophie has an enthusiasm that is infectious. She is particularly adept as a dancer, and throws herself into all movement activities.
5. *Bailey*: A student entering her senior year at a small public high school. Bailey has been in her high school theatre company throughout her years as a student. She comes across as reserved, but as the days progress, she talks more and more freely in the large group.

6. *Charles*: A student entering his senior year at the same small public high school Bailey attends. He, too, has been acting in the high school theatre company since his freshman year. Charles loves to talk about the text of *Frankenstein* and struggles a bit when it comes to the movement activities.
7. *Kim*: A student entering the eleventh grade, Kim came into the summer institute knowing no other students. One of his teachers is a teacher player, however, so he cleaves closely to his teacher's side for much of the first week of the institute.

### Teacher Follow Up Interviewees

I reached out to the first three teacher interviewees during the final days of the summer institute, asking whether they would be willing to participate in these follow up interviews. I chose Blythe, Mollie and Nora for three main reasons: first, because they had evidenced their careful consideration of the work of the summer institute throughout our two and a half weeks together in both conversation and written reflection; second, because of their geographic proximity; and third, because of their range of teaching experience.

1. *Blythe*: A teacher in her eleventh year in the classroom, Blythe currently teaches English 9-12 at a large, arts-based, selective public high school. There, she frequently collaborates with her colleague, facilitator Allan, on ambitious multimodal curricular projects. She has a significant background in theatre from her own high school years. With a quick wit and an eagerness to *do* rather than *talk*, Blythe emerged as a natural leader among the group of teacher and student players. I spoke with Blythe at the beginning of October and then again in mid February.
2. *Mollie*: A sixth grade teacher in her third year of teaching at a public arts-based middle school, Mollie has an extensive background in visual art and philosophy but feels less



sure of herself in the domain of theatre. She comes across as thoughtful and introspective in conversation, making sense of her thinking as she speaks. I interviewed Mollie at the end of September and then at the very end of December.

3. *Nora*: Nora is in her first year as a seventh and eighth grade teacher at a small private school. Nora carries herself like a dancer and took to the movement work of the summer institute immediately. She laughs easily and looks so youthful that many of the student players took her for a fellow student at first. Nora is a listener, an observer, often silent for the duration of a group discussion only to offer a startling insight at its close.
4. *Liz*: Another newer teacher, Liz is in her first full year as a tenth and eleventh grade English teacher at a private school. Before becoming a teacher, Liz worked full time to create theatre with a group of fellow actors, designers and directors. She moves through the world with an endearing mix of confidence and humility and became a beacon of positive energy throughout the summer institute (particularly when others' spirits flagged). I was not initially going to include Liz in the study, but she began posting about her experiments with movement-based activities in her classroom on our summer institute Facebook group, and I wanted to learn more about what she was doing.

With these participants—with this “cast list” in place—my study commenced.

## Chapter IV

### SETTING UP THE CONDITIONS TO CREATE

*Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed?  
-Mary Shelley, Frankenstein*

#### **In Prelude**

14, 085. *Black print stark against the white background on the screen. “Can anyone guess what this is?” John asks. Around the circle, players shrug, some with mouths agape. “Anyone?”*

*“A number?” one student player offers. There is scattered laughter, but nervous, uncertain. It is the first morning, and we have all just met. We sit on the carpeted floor looking up at screen that is fast becoming looming.*

*“Yes—it’s a number.” John grins. “Any other guesses?” Players shake their heads. “No one?” He waits. Silence. “Do you want me to tell you?” He waits. Players stare. He waits. Then turns to the screen. “Fourteen thousand and eighty five,” he reads aloud. He faces the players. He pauses, then speaks. “That’s how many minutes you have between now and the opening of our performance next week.”*

*“Yikes!” one player yelps. “But we have no performance!”*

*“You have fourteen thousand and eight five minutes,” John says. “Go.”*

And so our institute, like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, begins with something of a dare. In her introduction (included in the novel's 1831 edition), Shelley recounts the circumstances surrounding *Frankenstein*'s inception. It is the summer of 1816, and she, her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley, her step-sister Claire Claremont, Lord Byron and his doctor John Polidori gather at the Villa Diodati on the shores of Lake Geneva. Bound indoors by incessant rain, the group takes to reading ghost stories, and Byron challenges the Shelleys and Dr. Polidori to each pen a tale of their own. For days, Mary Shelley remains paralyzed: "I felt the blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations" (Shelley, p.8). As Lewis Hyde (1983) notes, "An essential portion of any artist's labor is not creation so much as invocation" (p.2895). So Shelley calls out, calls in. And at last, one night she receives an answer:

I placed my head on the pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie...(Shelley, p.9)

Shelley's imagination "possessed and guided" her; she professes no control or ownership over the tale that emerges from her dream. *Sing to me, Muse, of arms and the man*, Homer implores at the start of *The Odyssey* and indeed Shelley hearkens back to this ancient bardic tradition in which "we find...that men and women are not thought to be authors so much as vessels through which other forces act and speak" (Hyde, 2010, p.319). No other force speaks *through* Shelley, however; her imagination, rather, speaks *to* her, "gifting the successive images." Suddenly, we find this moment of inspiration (the impetus for creation) framed as a gift. Hyde (1983) observes, "...the imagination is not subject to the will of the artist. To accept the fruits of these things as gifts is to acknowledge that we are not their owners or masters, that we are, if anything, their servants, their ministers" (p. 2983). Shelley does not own the story of *Frankenstein*; she receives it. She writes, "On the morrow, I announced that I had thought of a story. I began that

day with the words ‘It was on a dreary night of November,’ making only a transcript of the grim terrors of my waking dream” (Shelley, p.9). Rather than originator, Shelley thus presents herself as stenographer, her imagination dictating that which she is to record. In recording, she receives those “successive images” from her imagination and in *Frankenstein*, amasses them. As a novel, *Frankenstein* becomes a gift in the aggregate.

We might argue, then, that in describing this writing process as one of transcription, Shelley positions it within a gift economy. And in fact from the moment Byron poses the ghost story challenge, he, in a sense, initiates that gift economy. Marcel Mauss (1966) tells us that gift economies encompass three related obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate. Byron *gives* a challenge (which we might see as a gift of inspiration in and of itself), his friends *receive* that challenge and all then attempt to *reciprocate* with gifts of their own in the form of stories (the creations of which, of course, require gifts of the imagination). These three related obligations intrinsic in a gift economy might seem to imply linearity (that the person who first gives then becomes the person to receive), but this is not the case. Mauss goes on to explain that the gift moves not in a line but in a circle. The receiver does have an obligation to pass the gift on, but the gift moves on to a third party, not back to the original donor. Shelley does not give the story of *Frankenstein* to Byron nor does she give it back to her imagination (that generous benefactor); she shares the gift of *Frankenstein* with all those at the Villa Diodati and subsequently—through publication—with the world as a whole. Hyde (1983) observes that “when you give a gift there is momentum, and the weight shifts from body to body” (p.329). So the question becomes: if Shelley *gives* us *Frankenstein* as a gift, what might it mean to *receive* it as such? What might it mean for the “weight” of that novel to shift into *our* collective body as readers?

David Jardine, Patricia Clifford and Sharon Friesen (2000) present one possible answer in the course of their “Scenes from Calypso’s Cave: On Globalization and the Pedagogical Prospects of the Gift.” Studying *The Odyssey* with a group of fifty grade 2 children in Canada:

We enticed them to ‘give their hearts away,’ to find in the tale the images, characters, words (the ‘good bits,’ as we and the children called them) that really spoke to each one of them and that were the opening or portal into what this tale might help us understand about ourselves and the great, mysterious arcs that tether us to this alluring place. (p.33)

The children illustrate moments in Homer’s epic of particular interest and those pictures are then posted on a class website, open to the public. The website remains on the Internet, but the children move on—to other grades, other projects. Three years later, a letter arrives at the school. A professor at Purdue University has happened upon the website and asks permission to use one of the children’s illustrations as the cover for his new modern Greek translation of *The Odyssey*. The children, parents and teachers are overwhelmed by this unexpected development. How did this happen, they wonder? Jardine, Clifford, and Friesen suggest that the explanation lies in the children’s approach to *The Odyssey*: “We had been reading...with an eye to its movement in our lives as a gift, as an arrival, not, then, with an eye to what we might get from it, but with an eye to how we might give ourselves to it and, in such giving of our attention and love, keep[] in motion its character as a gift” (p.33). The children had received *The Odyssey* as a gift, produced *Odyssey*-inspired artwork as a means of passing that gift on and then found their own gifts received and shared through the publication of this professor’s translation. And, as Jardine, Clifford, and Friesen observe, this modern Greek translation becomes “itself in part a releasing of the gift-movement of contemporary usage back into its living inheritance”; this translation infuses new life into Homer’s tale, what might otherwise be an inert text (p.34). Through the gift economy, we find yet another way of understanding David Cowart’s defense of new work born of the old (2012), of the way in which this text-inspired authorship

acts as an “agent of renewal” (p.26). We may term it text-“inspired” authorship, but it is the new work that “breathes life” into the old text—in this case, through the circular exchange of gifts.

But Jardine, Clifford, and Friesen recount an experience with *The Odyssey*, one might argue, a story “gifted” for centuries through the oral tradition, a “text” qualitatively different from a nineteenth century epistolary novel like Shelley’s. Yet is it so different? Jardine, Clifford, and Friesen write:

We choose [*The Odyssey*], therefore, not because it is some sort of “great book” but because it is *already on the move* in our culture, in the imaginations of children, in our images of journeys, in tales told and monsters imagined, in ideas of travel and home and family and fates and return. (p.34)

In *Frankenstein*, we find a tale similarly “*on the move*” and similarly entrenched in our cultural lexicon and imagination. Facilitator John, in his separate orientations with student and teacher players, reveals that a quick Google search of “Frankenstein” yields 13,900,000 results. He flashes a composite image of select *Frankenstein* derivations—a mosaic of movies, television shows, books, comics—*Lady Frankenstein*, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, *The Son of Frankenstein*, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman*, *Frankenstein Conquers the World*. Then he asks a single question: *What is it about this story that continues to compel us?* He might just as easily have asked: *Why is this story still “on the move in our culture”?* Because—undeniably—it is.

With *Frankenstein*, though, we encounter a somewhat jarring disjunction between the story moving through our culture and the story contained in Shelley’s novel. As student player Jake confesses:

Well, immediately, I mean, I for my entire life—and for at least half of us that I know—we have been so culturally and politically incorrect about the book, the fact that the monster or the creature I should say is not in fact called Frankenstein and that there’s so much more to the story that I never knew existed. (SF I)

In many ways, it seems that cultural iterations of *Frankenstein* have gradually supplanted Shelley’s narrative. The creature has lumbered out of Shelley’s text—forevermore to be

recognized as gargantuan and green hued, with a flat, protruding brow and bolts jutting from either side of his thick neck. He has lurched forward into the cultural spotlight as one of our archetypal monsters. In the process, Shelley's original novel has been left behind, obscured by his enormous shadow.

So when we speak of the exchange of gifts in relation to Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the metaphor takes on some urgency. For when we set aside *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman* (and its kin) and approach Shelley's *Frankenstein* as readers, we sometimes find a text devoid of life, as student players reveal:

CHARLES: For me, it was really for me when I read a book if I'm not interested in the first ten pages, it's very hard for me to get involved in the book. So the first time I read *Frankenstein*, I actually listened to the audio book for the first like through Walton's letters because they were just so dull... (SF I)

ALEX: In my case, this book was actually on the reading list, the summer reading list of last year, so I had read this book last summer but my experience with it was not it's a very short book and usually books that are around two hundred pages they take me about a day to read tops. This book took me the entire month. The entire month. And the reason was because of the things I found difficult and also there were some instances in which she spent several pages explaining one particular topic or one particular moment or one particular feeling and so I had a very, I had a little bit of a negative connotation to the book due to the experience I had last summer with it. (SF I)

A teacher player joins the student players in voicing frustration:

AUTUMN: So my ninth graders struggle with even reading *The Hunger Games*, like even below level texts they struggle with endurance and I think like especially during exposition, they can't get over the hump of exposition when a lot of information is being given to them. They find it very boring...which is interesting because I actually experienced the exact same thing with this text when I was reading it. (TF I)

The text is “dull,” “difficult,” “boring”; it becomes tempting to cast the novel aside. Placing the text within the circularity of gift exchange—“releasing...the gift-movement of contemporary usage back into its living inheritance”—becomes critical as a means of revivification. If Shelley's *Frankenstein* is to endure, it seems we must receive it as a gift. We must read “with an

eye to its movement in our lives as a gift, as an arrival...with an eye to how we might give ourselves to it.” But how?

### **Assembling the Facilitation Team**

*I enter the library and wend my way around the long tables, students hunched over books and laptop computers. The early afternoon sun streams through the windows. I head towards the back corner room, a study room reserved for the next few hours. I open the door. I'm the last one. "Adele!" John says, "Welcome!" I roll a chair out from the middle of the table and sit down. "You remember Allan, right?" Allan sits across from me.*

*"Hi," I say, tentative. Allan smiles, his cheeks crinkling, his eyes twinkling. He nods.*

*"And Max?" John continues. "You know Max?"*

*"Of course we know each other," Max says. He adjusts his glasses.*

*"Hi," I say. I was in a class with Max, years ago.*

*"So Adele and I have been talking a lot," John says, "And Allan and Max and I have been talking a lot. And now we're finally together. Here we are. The team."*

### **John**

"I don't want to overthink it, but it feels like a natural progression to me," John says (IN I). The summer institute will begin in the following morning. He continues: "From when I didn't get a part in the seventh grade *Wizard of Oz* play" (IN I). John talks about the way he was beginning to withdraw from school in sixth grade until his receipt of the lead role in the sixth grade play; suddenly, he wanted to come to school each day:

There really is something I've always seen, performance, publication, those kind of investment in bigger things is about the most powerful thing we can do in education and



yet they're extracurricular and very often you don't make the cut, you're not accepted. So from seventh grade, you know, my teaching was always about embedding those things in the curriculum. (IN I)

When “those things”—performance, publication—become embedded in the curriculum, every student then has access, and every student gets to experience that “investment in bigger things.” John has spent much of his fifteen-year career as a teacher educator guiding teachers in crafting projects around just this kind of investment. As John says, “There’s a huge part of this work that is about trying to shift *why we learn*” [italics mine] (IN I).

*But why call this program Performance at the Center, if publication of any kind achieves the same type of shift in motivation?* I ask. *How do you define “performance”?* John hesitates. “There was a point where I thought performance was about what we do with our bodies and voices to communicate...” he trails off, thinks. “When we’re holding a classroom conversation about literature and one of the boys in the class puffs up his chest and says something about one of the characters in the book, the kind of machismo bond, that’s performance, but it’s all performance.” John pauses again. “So that’s just to say I don’t really know what performance means.” John admits that he does not have a background in performance. He has experimented with drama in his own teaching but has never realized a full production with students or teachers. But what interests him about *Performance at the Center* is precisely that: the audacity of the task at hand. He says:

It’s almost like there are pieces that are deliberately subversive in this...kind of like in your face creativity. There is something about saying we’re going to do something that’s absolutely crazy and we’re going to invite everyone who’s involved to be wildly creative. (IN I)

The excitement for John resides in the surprise. “There’s something about...not knowing where we’re going exactly,” he says, that becomes an enticement (IN I). John has designed large-scale

projects before (Max, in fact, deems John “a wizard with the way that he builds curriculum” (IN I)). John has founded an entire program dedicated to the support of student publication. But

*Performance at the Center* emerges as a different form of “publication”:

I guess one of things I'm interested in is...when you ask somebody to step inside a book, not just kind of the solo interaction that you have a book, where you step into that fantasy and you live it. What does it mean to build that socially? I'm really interested in that...it's a thing of how do we build the conditions for wonder? I think that's the question and that feels really important to me in this work, trying to better understand that and then communicate to others. (John, IN I)

The summer institute becomes a site for John to explore his own questions as an educator.

Facilitating *Performance at the Center* presents John with the opportunity to surprise himself.

### **Allan**

“It’s an amped up version of what I do in my classroom,” Allan says of the summer institute. “I’m really, really excited about taking this aspect of my teaching and really developing it further, because it’s an approach to teaching English that I really believe in” (IN I).

Allan, a classroom teacher with almost ten years of experience, works at a selective high school specializing in the arts. He gives me an example of an analogous project in his own classroom:

So I think since my first year of teaching in New York, so I think for nine years – either eight or nine years – I’ve done the *Catcher in the Rye* theme project, which started out with students extracting or creating their articulations of the core ideas of *Catcher in the Rye* and then finding alternative means of representing it, in addition to a traditional essay. They would also then use visual representation, a dramatic representation, artistic representation to try and convey the same things that they were conveying in their analytics essays. And like I said, I’ve done that I think since my first year of teaching in New York, first or second. And so it’s evolved and it’s become more elaborate over time and the work that students produce out of it is usually really inspiring, especially now, when I have such a talented student body. But even beforehand, even in my old school, where they weren’t explicitly artists. The work that did was engaged. They cared about it. (IN I)

Interesting here is the way in which Allan underscores the shift in motivation for his students. The project he describes is not a publication per se, nor is it a full-scale performance. And yet Allan's students seem to maintain an investment similar to the one John attributes to "bigger things." Allan suggests, then, that students' engagement in the work stems from the "artistic representation"—the invitation to work in media beyond the written word. As a classroom English teacher, Allan has continued to experiment with artistic representation—welcoming guest teaching artists into his classroom and designing large-scale multimedia projects around texts. But he is careful to distinguish between his prior work and the work of *Performance at the Center*:

The culminating project is going to be produced to a degree which I've never done before. Usually what I do with these is usually individual or maybe partner projects, if they wish, and then I'll have everybody – with just a regular classroom, maybe two or three days will be devoted to everybody sharing their projects...[also] the idea of having guest artists every, almost every single day, doing workshops to that extent is so much bigger than I would have done before. And what I'm hoping for them is that I will be able to glean whatever I can from these guest artists. And while it'll be an impoverished form of it, to try and implement some of the same workshops that the guest artist could bring in...[this project] is on a scale that is beyond what I tried to undertake and also beyond what I was capable of undertaking. (IN I)

Even while Allan brings significant classroom experience to his facilitation of *Performance at the Center*, he manifests humility—he will enact "an impoverished form" of those guest teaching artist workshops in his own classroom, the project "is on a scale that is beyond...what [he] was capable of undertaking." When I ask whether he anticipates any challenges in the facilitation of the institute, Allan replies:

The dynamics of teacher/students all as players, I think is gonna be really interesting to see how that plays out. And I think that it's gonna require a lot of sensitivity on our part and a lot of reading and engaging the temperature of the room, and reading and engaging just where everybody's at socially and psychologically. But I think that it has a potential of being something that's really, really cool...that's also I guess something that then could potentially transfer back to the classroom. The less of teacher as a dictator and more a

teacher as collaborator sort of, which is something that I've just recently started more to engage in with my students this year. I've started giving them more control over the classroom than I ever have in the past, and so that's something that I could see learning from in this institute. (IN I)

Allan positions himself from the beginning as a facilitator who will “[read]...the temperature of the room”; he will be attuned to the social dynamics of the student and teacher players. And he also—significantly—positions himself as a learner. As a facilitator, Allan enters the summer institute looking to learn from everyone he encounters.

### **Max**

From the outset, Max registers the most uneasiness of my three fellow facilitators around the work of *Performance at the Center*. “In the planning piece of it, I think I've been – I've had the chance to work with people who are much more experienced than I am in teaching, and so I think my role has been to kind of question some of the pieces of the curriculum,” he says (IN I).

Max reflects on one particularly tense moment in the planning process:

So I know that we had a pretty serious disagreement about the ways that we're going to discuss this text...you all thought that a performance embodiment of a piece of text would be a really clear distillation of some passage, and I resist that, or at least resisted it. I think I'm more open to it now after having a conversation and seeing that that's a legitimate response as opposed to just talking about it and using my words, and I'm a person very comfortable talking and thinking things through, and I enjoy it, I find it pretty personally gratifying to think things through and have ideas and put words to them, as opposed to somebody who might gather it through an image or through music. And so I have to admit that I was changed by that conversation, but I was – because I was initially a little bit skeptical, like okay, we're going to have a dance, that's great, of this thing, of that moment in chapter five, yeah, because what does it feel like to do it through music. For me, I want to then bring it back to ideas. (IN I)

While Max professes to have been “changed by that conversation,” his words betray that he was not, not quite. He resists “that a performance embodiment of a piece of text would be a really

clear distillation of some passage,” but in so saying, Max misses the purpose of the embodiment: the work is not meant to *distill* a passage (with its implication of summary or synopsis) but to *explore* a passage, to probe the text through movement. So Max’s insistence that we “then bring it back to ideas” reveals his belief that “ideas” can only be ones we articulate in words. Yet he also suggests that a dance, an image, or a piece of music can all contribute to the formation of ideas—these become means through which “somebody might gather” ideas. But there remains a stubborn hierarchy in this thinking: the ultimate goal is always the expression of ideas through words. Max acknowledges his own resistance and confusion:

And so the – okay, so then maybe dancing is the way you access that thinking and so that makes sense to me, and so I end up doing this a lot, end up thinking how problematic our approach is and then I always end up coming back here because it seems to be very thoroughly important and it should be a part of my own thinking and my own teaching. So I don't know, I find myself disagreeing with the things that we have in our institute, so for example, like we're all going to make a bunch of remixes of *Frankenstein*, so then we're all going to make drawings that convey our personal ideas of what the future looks like, or we're going to pick a page and make an interpretation that's visual that conveys something about the mood of the sound. What? Like what for, why don't we talk about what we think? That would be much more direct, why would we do all this other stuff, and then I think after thinking about it, those interpretations can be really valuable and kind of add complexity and add entry points, and we just talked about what I think is often really fluid and often doesn't get to places that I would like to get done with. And so I think I go in circles a lot about what I disagree with and what I agree with, and if you got me on a different day than right now, I'd probably disagree and agree. (IN I)

Max does not entirely know what he is arguing against. “Why don’t we talk about what we think?” becomes his refrain throughout our planning conversations. But for Max, it is not just the scale of the performance that is new, but the integration of multimodal approaches to text in general. Max admits:

I think there's a great balance in the curriculum, for me, between the things that I know what I'm doing and the things that...I've never done before. I wanted to stretch and take serious risks as a teacher and as a learner, so the performance piece or the improvisation piece or the movement piece, like those are never – I've never done anything like that in

my classroom really, and so through that, kind of in balancing that with things that I know how to do really well or things that I feel confident about or things that I have done in my classroom. So that's things that I think, I mean, finding ways to – I think it's – a lot of it comes down that, like stretching boundaries for myself. (IN I)

I would suggest that Max's resistance during the planning process stems directly from his inexperience. Ironically, Max has only *talked* about this work of text-inspired creation, and this talk it seems (much as Max himself might argue otherwise) is not enough. John says of the summer institute:

I really, really think that, more than anything, what we can give these teachers is the understanding that this work is completely transformative. If they walk away with that, the theory will come. It's almost like you back into it, rather than starting with the theory and then moving into practice. You start with this practice, you hope that people will be changed by the practice. (IN I)

Though in role as a facilitator, Max, too, needs to “back into” the work of *Performance at the Center*: he needs to participate in text-inspired creation in practice. Max repeatedly professes a desire to “to try to allow [himself] to change” (IN I). But the reality remains that Max comes into the summer institute poised to facilitate an experience he himself has never had.

### **Inviting Entry**

*“It’s all wrong,” John says. He dashes about the office, yanking rolls of fabric from corners and frantically piling books and mannequin limbs onto a rolling cart. “Our room—it’s big and there’s a carpet, but it’s set up in rows, lots of tables and chairs...terrible. But Allan is already over there, and this—” he gestures vaguely at the overflowing cart— “will help. We can do something with this.”*

*I enter the classroom for the first time an hour later. John watches me as I stand, looking. Tables line the walls, chairs placed in front creating a wide circle around the empty*

*center of the room. More chairs sit atop the tables all along the back of the room, draped in a huge swath of grayish-pink fabric. At the front of the room, a silken cloth covers another long table, books related to Frankenstein standing upright amongst carefully scattered fiberglass legs and arms. Perched on the lamp of the overhead projector in the front corner is a classic rubber Frankenstein's monster mask, the surveyor of all. "Wow," I say. "Wow."*

*"Nice touch, right?" John says. He smiles.*

JOHN: ...I guess there's something about -- this sounds corny, but I love the idea of part of what a teacher in this kind of work, I would say a teacher anywhere is muse. It's not a typical muse, it's almost like a muse teaching artists and teaching muses because I want students to become inspiring to themselves and others but I really do, I love the idea that at [one writing workshop] I brought down these tiny little glass vials with these miniature train set people, you know, like half-inch people inside the vials. I put them all in paper bags and very serious deadpan handed them out and I said, 'go extend this metaphor and see where it takes you.' And there's something about surprise, mystery building a very unpredictable environment for learning and building it up enough that then you can kind of step back and watch the students not only play in that space but kind of take over that space. The goal is set it up, set it up, set it up, set it out...(IN I)

"A teacher anywhere is muse." So often, we speak of teachers as planners, as scaffolders, even as designers. But teachers as muses? What might that mean? Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2013) writes:

...the creative person somehow must develop an unconscious mechanism that tells him or her what to do. The poet Gyorgy Faludy usually does not start writing until a 'voice' tells him, often in the middle of the night, 'Gyorgy, it's time to start writing.' He adds ruefully, 'that voice has my number, but I don't have his.' The ancients called that voice the Muse. (p.114)

Csikszentmihalyi's conception of Muse makes the role a natural one for any teacher to assume—as Muse, the teacher serves as the "voice" telling her students what to do. She informs them that the time has come to begin. But Csikszentmihalyi goes on to explain that it may not be as simple as that:

Very often this is how the Muse communicates—through a glass darkly, as it were. It is a splendid arrangement, for if the artist were not tricked by the mystery, he or she might never venture into the unexplored territory. (p.115)

So the Muse must operate covertly, never directly telling the artist what to do. John requests that his students “go extend the metaphor” of those Lilliputian figures encased in glass, but he does not tell them what that metaphor is. Interestingly, he tells them not just to extend the metaphor but to “go,” to venture out. He gently pushes them into that “unexplored territory.” But he begins by giving them a tangible gift. He makes literal the gifts of the Muse.

John opens the summer institute, too, with tangible gifts. In the month preceding the institute, he sends each teacher player a package (the student players receive theirs in person at orientation). Within, they find a blank journal, a packet of ephemera (copies of pages from eighteenth and nineteenth century books, drawn from a collection John has accrued through myriad visits to flea markets over the years), a letter welcoming the players to the institute, and a copy of Shelley’s novel. Teacher player Blythe reflects:

I think it’s things like the notebook. I mean everyone when they got their notebook in talking to people they were so excited, and it’s a prop in some ways, right? But it’s sort of like when you’re acting and you have to wear your dance shoes when you’re playing that character because you know you’re dancing or you have to wear a skirt to play a Victorian lady because a Victorian lady wears a skirt, you have to embody that. So I guess like the props, the pieces, like the tangible experience of it is important as well. Like just giving us that notebook, like your thoughts are important, this is your special book, write it down, like everything you’re thinking, hold onto it and the ephemera that came with it I think set the tone of this is for learning and writing and exploration (TF I).

The journal arrives as a surprise, engendering a buzz of excitement; the Muse has started to whisper, to beckon. And even as Blythe recognizes the journal and its accompanying ephemera as “props,” this recognition does not seem to diffuse the power of the mystery surrounding them. Still she feels the pull to “write it down, like everything [she’s] thinking, hold onto it.” In receiving the gift of the journal, Blythe acknowledges a kind of obligation to “give” her thoughts



in return. With a single mailing, John sets the gift economy—and the artistic process—of the institute in motion.

John, a Muse communicating “through a glass darkly,” considers these gifts carefully, and there is nothing arbitrary about the contents of this mailing:

I think exciting has been, well certainly exciting was handing out the journals...when you take such care in the details and I really do believe that there's something about-- that's why I feel like design and aesthetics and the look of things in school is so terribly overlooked. When we value the details, we really set it up and watching peoples' surprise by that and that's not really planning. (John, IN I)

John delights in “watching people’s surprise;” as Lee Ann Fennell (2002) tells us, “the giving and getting of gifts taps into certain desires...to surprise and be surprised” (p.86). He finds a dealer online who will make all the journals by hand, and each is unique—a slightly different shade of brown, a slightly different cut of leather across the cover. The covers are soft, thick, the sweet smell of leather escaping as soon as the flaps are opened. The pages stitched inside are stiff, but not too stiff. No hint of the writing on one side of a page will appear on its reverse. John asks two student interns to ready the twenty six packets of ephemera but first, he holds a meeting to prepare them. The selection of the ephemera will be up to you, he says, but take some time deciding what to include. Think about what’s intriguing to you. Only include what’s intriguing to you.

Always, John works to cultivate intrigue and mystery. Reflecting on his collaboration with John, facilitator Allan says:

What I find amazing about working with John is that he more than just about anyone that I've worked with in the past possesses a genius for creating the environment for learning and creation. He can make the conditions such that you want to engage. You want to create and you think of things, oh, you maybe haven't thought of before. And there's this sort of inspiration in what he does. So that I think is something that I'm trying to glean...the use of ephemera, the use of physical material objects, which if it's not done thoughtfully, it can be gimmicky. But if it's done thoughtfully, it can inspire to a depth that my traditional teaching has not done and I have not seen in other teachers. (IN I)

Allan speaks of the inspiration *in* what John does, but also the inspiration *of* this physical material object use—the way in which this ephemera make “you think of things, oh, you maybe haven’t thought of before.” How does this work, though?

Samuel Coleridge (1817) separates the imagination into two parts in his *Biographia*

*Literaria*:

The imagination then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception...the secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former...it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. (p.126)

The use of ephemera works to activate both the primary and secondary imagination: it provides material to be perceived by the former which can then be “dissolve[d], diffuse[d], dissipate[d]” and finally “unif[ied]” by the latter. If we return to Mary Shelley’s story of writing *Frankenstein* for a moment, we find that it becomes easy to conflate the imagination and the Muse, for both, in some sense, gift inspiration. Yet Coleridge’s understanding of the primary and secondary imagination helps to refine the distinction between the workings of the imagination and the workings of the Muse. While Mary Shelley professes to author *Frankenstein* out of those images “gifted” by her imagination, she suggests a direct source for those images:

Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener. During one of these, various philosophical doctrines were discussed, and among others the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated...night waned upon this talk...before we retired to rest. When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me... (p.8-9)

As a “nearly silent listener,” Mary Shelley sits in this conversation and perceives, her primary imagination furiously gathering material. When she lays her head upon the pillow, her secondary imagination assumes the lead and begins to work, synthesizing all that she has

heard. What Mary Shelley hears, however, is what she chooses to hear; her secondary imagination does not synthesize the entirety of the conversation. Certain parts of Byron and Shelley's dialogue pique her interest, and those are the pieces her primary imagination retains.

John frames his gifting of the journals and packets of ephemera in much the same way: as a larger conversation from which players can choose pieces. In the note accompanying the mailing of the journal, he writes:

Periodically you will receive **Invitations to Create** from us. These prompts to write, read, and remix are meant to entice, trigger, and occasionally even inspire. But they should always be considered *invitations*. If one speaks to you, run with it. See where it leads, feel only as bound to the constraints as you, the author, choose. Hopefully these prompts will help limber our thinking for our summer work.

For two weeks prior to the summer institute, the players receive an *invitation to create* via email each day. The invitations range in content—one asks the players to step into the shoes of Margaret Saville and write brother Robert Walton a letter in response to one of his missives, another to capture a dream of the creature in his first nights of sleep, another to respond to a Francis Bacon image in relation to Shelley's novel. Most invitations end with some version of the following: *capture your thinking...in one of the pages in your notebook (in whatever form(s) you'd like)*. On a given day, a player opens an invitation and must make a decision: will she accept this invitation to create or will she ignore it? Her journal rests open beside her, a page crisp, blank. Perhaps she runs her hand over this page and then reaches for the envelope of ephemera. She scatters the ephemera across her desk, picks one scrap up, holds it closer to her lamp, then another. She looks back at the computer screen, re-reads the invitation. She looks down again at the scrap of ephemera in one hand and with the other rips some tape from the desk dispenser. She tapes the scrap gently to the center of her journal page. And then she picks up a pen and begins to draw and write around it.

So how, in this instance, does John function as gifting muse and, still further, how do these gifts set up the conditions for text-inspired creation? John emphasizes in his introductory note the choice involved in these invitations: players can *choose* to take up an invitation or ignore it. If they do accept an invitation, they need “only [feel] as bound to the constraints as [they], the author[s], *choose*” [emphasis mine]. Subtly, John makes clear that this is not a commodified, but a gift exchange, for “the idea is to introduce the element of play into the exchange; to oblige, yes, but freely” (Godbout & Caille, 1998, p.188). John says that “hopefully these prompts will help limber our thinking for our summer work,” and indeed they do: the invitations prime players to notice *how* Shelley’s text might inspire creation. Though John is the facilitator to send out the invitations, Allan, Max and I each contribute to their authoring: we divide the generation of invitations equally among the four of us. As I consider the penning of my own invitations, I re-read *Frankenstein* looking specifically for gaps and silences: which characters don’t speak (the invitation for Margaret’s letter)? Where are there moments alluded to but never elaborated upon (an invitation to investigate Justine and her mother’s relationship)? Many of our invitations therefore point players to spaces in the text, those spaces that function themselves as invitations for readers to take Umberto Eco’s “inferential walks.” So our *invitations to create* also serve to help players notice those “invitations to create” embedded within the text. The invitations work in tandem with the journals and ephemera to become another kind of gift: we might conceive of the invitations as gifted *opportunities* for creation and the journals and ephemera as gifted *tools* with which to take advantage of those opportunities.

As Allan indicates, though, the mere use of physical objects as “gifted tools” does not automatically lead to inspiration; the selection must be “done thoughtfully.” I ask John about his process of selection:

INTERVIEWER: How did you decide what to exclude? So if an idea came up, how did you know that it wasn't right?

JOHN: That's a really good question. The ones that felt like they were my ideas for creating a product, I attempted to push to the side...I'd have these kind of visions of what this could look like and then walking it back from there...like the scene of the Medicine Man from *The English Patient* that just keeps coming to me is this powerful, powerful image that would fit...[but] I think part of that editing process was reminding myself 'this is their show' and when things came in that I was excited to do that felt more about it being my show, that became a clear indication that that one should get cut. (IN I)

John suggests that to select “thoughtfully” requires more than a recognition of what might be “gimmicky”; it requires a distinction between that which inspires the teacher and that which might inspire the player. “Not I, Not I, but the wind that blows through me,” D.H. Lawrence says of his writing’s origins, suggesting that he serves as an open channel through which “the wind” (or breath of the Muse) blows (Hyde, 1983, p.100). But John deliberately avoids breathing “through” the players, “reminding [him]self ‘this is their show.’” That resolution becomes fraught, however, when John has “these kind of visions of what this could look like and then walking it back from there,” for then the materials offered to the players exist only in the guise of inspiration; their use has already been determined. The teacher has become the creator.

### Structuring Freedom

A month before the start of the summer institute, in fact, I sit at the round wooden table in John’s office. “Maybe we could start with someone in role as a teacher teaching *Frankenstein* in a really traditional way,” John says. He is brainstorming ideas for the beginning of the show. “And then...” he continues. I listen as he spins a version of the entire performance piece. I send him the following email that evening:

from:	adele bruni
to:	John

date:	Tue, June 4, 2014 at 7:15 PM
subject:	A matter of form...

*I've been thinking a great deal about this question of form...it actually gets at the heart of what we so often grapple with as writing teachers. For what we are essentially doing is writing a show...so the question becomes one of authorship. In considering how the other shows have come to be in the past (the Writers on Stage performances, certainly, but really all of the directing work I've done), I think I've watched carefully during the rehearsal process, logging all of the material generated perhaps subconsciously. At some point (often a crisis point—the show must be created!), I've sat down and structured the piece out of all that has been amassed. I don't have a structure in mind at the start of the process...the structure always seems (at least to me) to emerge organically from the material itself. Often, I've attempted to involve students in the past by guiding them through the following:*

- 1) Discussion of the overall purpose of the final performance—what do they want the audience to do/feel/understand as a result of experiencing the work? Creation of a title for the final performance.*
- 2) Selection of pieces aligned with this intent—pieces they want included in the final performance.*
- 3) Categorization of pieces—students generate overarching categories/ links among pieces and then sort them accordingly. The performance thus has a kind of episodic structure.*
- 4) Sequencing of episodes—students order the episodes in a way they feel builds to convey their overall intent.*

*This process leads to the original (albeit rough) script; we then revise and refine as we rehearse, finding out what works, what needs to be amended, what needs to be elaborated*

*upon. The episodic structure helps because then students can be assigned to particular “episodes” (full group pieces can serve as transitions) and then work specifically on the polishing of that piece. They therefore have an idea of the overall structure, while only maintaining directorial responsibility for their episode. It becomes our job as instructors to assure the cohesion and coherence of the whole, weaving together the episodes through appropriate transitions. Does that make sense?*

*Now, this is only the basic process that I’ve used in the past, and I am certainly open to other ideas. I just worry that if we attempt to impose too much of a structure from the beginning, then it becomes analogous to the five paragraph essay—the writing process is messy, and part of writing is the discovery of structure. I don’t want to deprive them of that. But perhaps if they are aware of our construction process from the start? Then they’ll know there is some method to the seeming madness...*

In 1994, Jean Sanborn observes that at the turn of the century “the academic essay stiffens...as if it were being bound in a straitjacket...[as] an initial concern for the organic growth of ideas is overtaken by a concern for regularized form” (as quoted by Bruce Pirie, p.75). Sanborn refers to the emergence of the five paragraph academic essay, a quickly ubiquitous “form” that Bruce Pirie (1997) terms “mind forged manacles.” Pirie posits that such a pre-determined form works in direct opposition to the writing process for “writing, at its core, is a matter of finding and making the shapes of ideas” (p.77) . And so it is with the generation of the *Frankenstein* performance piece: the task becomes a matter of locating and molding ideas into a cohesive, coherent form. How, though, does this process happen?

When I started this research project, I asked: *How do facilitators scaffold the co-creation of a multimodal performance piece?* As I continued to revisit that question, however, I kept

tripping over the verb—that “scaffold.” Were we facilitators really *scaffolding* the final performance piece? Dennis Searle (1984) tells us that “scaffolding” emerges as an educational term when Jerome Bruner (1975) discusses an interaction between a mother and a young child: “In such instances mothers most often see their role as supporting the child in achieving an intended outcome, entering only to assist or reciprocate or ‘scaffold’ the action” (p.12 as quoted in Bruner “The Ontogenesis of Speech Acts” *Journal of Child Language* 2, 1975). “Scaffolding” thereafter becomes synonymous with student support; the teacher “scaffolds” in an effort to assist the student in a given action. Critical to note here—and the source of my discomfort, I believe—is that this assistance is in service of “an *intended* outcome” (italics mine). To “scaffold” is thus to structure student experience towards a pre-determined end. Searle observes: “It appears that the term scaffolding is being used to justify some long-standing and, in my view, questionable classroom interaction patterns” (p.481). The “questionable classroom interaction patterns” arise from an exertion of control: through “scaffolding,” the teacher not only controls the student’s product, but also every step of the student’s process. Implicit is an assumption on the part of the teacher: *I know exactly where I want you to go, and I know exactly how to get you there.*

What I describe in my email to John—and what became our challenge as facilitators—was how we might structure the generative process of the players while not dictating a definitive end product. Searle cautions, “Too often, the teacher is the builder and the child is expected to accept and occupy a predetermined structure” (p.482). And this is true if that “predetermined structure” *is* the end product, for then the child must “accept and occupy” (with a kind of resignation and passivity) what the teacher has already decided she will produce; once again, we see the teacher as creator (a direction in which I sensed John was heading in our



conversation). This assumes that process and product are one and the same and that a specifically structured process will lead invariably to a particular product. Searle notes, “Schools...are rarely effective in allowing children either to initiate topics or to shape the experience for themselves...as a result, scaffolding can more often become the imposition of a structure on the student” (p.481).

But does scaffolding have to be an “imposition”? Must a specific process always lead to a particular product? Searle allows for only one builder--teacher or student. Why must it be either or? If schools are to be effective “in allowing children...to initiate topics,” they must give students the opportunity to initiate those topics: they must open (give) spaces. But the opening of space, the defining of space, requires the construction of bounds. What if the building of the teachers—that scaffolding—occurred in parallel to the creation of the students, the teachers opening up new spaces in response to the developing “building” of the students? This is what we, as facilitators, set out to do.

How might one recognize this subtle distinction between constructing an environment for student (or in this case, player) creation and becoming the creator? “What’s the balance between teacher displays of creativity and student displays of creativity?” I ask in my fieldnotes (FN, 7/10/14). John shares:

It's funny, at times I've felt like my teaching, I think a lot of teachers go through this, I'm always conscious of a balance between the me show and my students and like when is it about me? When is my teaching self-centered, when is my teaching about my ego? (IN II)

Peter McLaren (1988) might call the “me show” to which John refers a version of “teacher-as-entertainer”—a scenario in which students “remain[] isolated and unreflective viewers of the action...[when] the students [a]re in the process of being entertained” (p.165). McLaren contrasts “teacher-as-entertainer” with what he terms “teacher-as-liminal-servant”:

When students respond[] with a sense of immediacy or purpose, either verbally or gesturally, to the teacher's performance--when, for instance, they [become] the primary actors...which [i]s characterized by intense involvement and participation...in this case, the teacher achieved the role of liminal servant. (1988, p.165)

In a sense, the teacher-as-liminal-servant thus propels students across the threshold from passivity to activity.

But this activity arises in response to “the teacher’s performance”; McLaren’s conceptions of “teacher-as-entertainer” and “teacher-as-liminal-servant” therefore may be too dichotomous. More appropriate and comprehensive might be the appellation “teacher-as-actor,” for an actor thinks constantly of what he wants his audience to do, feel or understand; his moves to elicit those desired responses constitute his “action” (Jory, 2000, p.4). Facilitator Max reveals:

I think I'm also worried about – for myself personally – being a showman. And so I resist anything that is us presenting really fabulous stuff, because I feel like I'm selling things and that makes me uncomfortable, especially because I'm so young as a teacher...and [in] my classroom for the past three years, one of my main struggles has been to not be the center of attention, to get off the stage, to make things for my students. And I think that's an interesting place. (IN I)

Though Max expresses discomfort in “being a showman” and “selling things,” the very notion of “selling” indicates a desire for activity on the part of his audience. The teacher “sells” with the hope that his students will “buy” or “buy in,” an initial action that might then lead to more “intense [student] involvement and participation” (McLaren’s ideal of the teacher-as-liminal-servant). So while Max struggles “to get off the stage,” that may not be the answer; the students may need him to be on the stage—at least at times—in order to get involved themselves. Instead, then, the question to ask may be: *why* is the teacher on the stage? Or, if we are speaking in theatrical terms, what is the teacher’s *objective*?

A return to the lens of the gift economy may be helpful here in parsing the teacher’s motivation for showmanship. If John conceptualizes of his role in the classroom as one of gifting Muse (which he does), then his question of “when is it about me?” and Max’s struggle “to

make things for [his] students” really become matters of expectation as gift-givers. When the teacher gives to her students, what does she expect in return? For she does expect something. As Jacques Godbout and Allain Caille (1998) observe, “...the free gift does not exist...for the gift serves above all to establish relations, and a relationship with no hope of return (from the individual receiving the gift or his substitute), a one way relationship, disinterested and motiveless, would be no relationship at all” (p.7). John gives his students the figures within the glass vials and expects them to create something. He gives the players the journals and ephemera with that same expectation. In both cases, the students/players receive material objects with which they are to do something. The expectation—while not articulated as a “return gift” (for “making the rule of reciprocity explicit kills the gift, and can even result in non-reciprocity”)—is nevertheless clear (Godbout & Caille, 1998, p.189).

It becomes more ambiguous, however, when the gifts are not material. My question about the distinction between teacher creativity and student creativity comes out of the institute’s daily remix share. As facilitators, we had designated the first fifteen to twenty minutes following each lunch break as a “Remix Share,” an opportunity for players to share their developing (often individual, at-home) experiments in the remixing of *Frankenstein*. On the first day, facilitator Allan presents his own remix—a montage of video and still images overlaid with narration and music exploring a passage in Shelley’s text. Allan closes his presentation with a few words about how eagerly he anticipates the sharing of the players’ work in the coming days. If we view this inaugural remix as a gift to the players, then “having accepted what has been given to [them]...[these players] often feel[] compelled, feel[] the *desire*, to make the work and offer it to an audience...the gift must stay in motion” (Hyde, 1983, p.2939).

Allan's gift gains momentum as the days progress. On the second day, facilitator Max gathers several student players to join him in an original remix and as the week goes on, the remix share becomes longer and longer as more players sign up to present. On the fourth day, the day referenced in my fieldnotes, John asks to have his name on the list. Five players have already signed up to share. "Just sneak me in," John says, "Mine is not exactly related to *Frankenstein*, but it's fun. I think the players will like it." He plays his remix at the end of the day's share out—a very brief video mash-up composed around the way the institute is "exploding" (and it does contain a fiery explosion) ideas around the traditional teaching of literature. "Cool, right?" John says to the players afterwards, "So cool." Players nod, say "yeah," smile. But I notice that they do not dwell on the video. Quickly, they turn to each other and return to talking about their own remix projects.

I wonder about this seeming lack of response to John's remix. Does this relative silence stem from his role as a facilitator or from the nature of the remix itself? Given the enthusiasm around Allan and Max's remixes earlier in the week, I tend to lean towards the latter. Allan and Max present their remixes in response to Shelley's text; they donate their pieces to a gradually expanding shared pool of creations born of *Frankenstein*. Immediately, their remixes join the circulation of gifts in the room. John's remix, growing out of the institute rather than Shelley's text, comments *on* this gift exchange rather than existing *within* it. While John may give players this remix, they fail to receive and pass it on; so what does John expect in return? I would argue that he shares his piece not to inspire more player remixes, but to receive praise, to be recognized for his creativity.

This particular instance of John's remix share becomes a moment of ego, and it provides an interesting means of recognizing those ego-laden moments when examined in the context of

the gift economy. “When,” John asks, “is my teaching self-centered, when is my teaching about my ego?” (IN II) If we return once more to this notion of teacher as gifting Muse, then we might answer John’s question simply by looking at the intended movement of the teacher’s gift. In giving the players journals, for instance, John expects his gift to be passed on, to move away from him. In presenting his remix, by contrast, John expects (likely unconsciously) for the players to give him accolades. As Hyde (1983) tells us:

...the gift moves in a circle, and two people do not make much of a circle. Two points establish a line, but a circle lies in a plane and needs at least three points. This is why, as we shall see, most of the stories of gift exchange have a minimum of three people...When a gift moves in a circle its motion is beyond the control of the personal ego, and so each bearer must be a part of the bearer must be a part of the group and each donation is an act of social faith. (p.455)

Garnering praise through a gift thus establishes a direct line between (in this case) teacher and player rather than a circle of teacher and players. To avoid “self-centered” teaching, then, the teacher must give with an intent to establish this larger circle, a circle characterized by motion “beyond the control of the personal ego.” The teacher as muse must give with the expectation that her students will pass gifts on, not pass them back.

### **Adding Dimension and Welcoming Happenstance**

To further avoid the kind of linearity dictated by the personal ego of any one facilitator, we facilitators very deliberately design opportunities for divergence through the planning of the teaching artist workshops. Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, in their 2010 article “The Creativity Crisis,” tell us that “to be creative requires divergent thinking (generating many unique ideas) and then convergent thinking (combining those ideas into the best result),” and this is precisely how we attempt to design the summer institute (p.1). The first week centers on divergent thinking and the second (beginning on the Monday afternoon of the second week when

we select “episodes” and order the show) on convergent thinking. As the facilitator serving as the liaison between the institute and the teaching artists who come in to lead workshops that first week, it becomes my responsibility to prepare the teaching artists in such a way that will maximize that divergent thinking—that each workshop offers a distinct exploration of the text. Knowing that we are going to spend that first morning of the institute generating questions out of Shelley’s text (and that each day will close with the articulation of more text-based questions from the players), I try to leave the content of each teaching artist workshop undefined for as long as possible, hoping that the questions to be explored will emerge from the players. On Saturday of the first week, for instance, I write to our final teaching artist (who will lead a workshop on Monday morning of the second week):

from:	<b>adele bruni</b>
to:	Emilia
date:	Sat, Jul 12, 2014 at 5:50 AM
subject:	Re: Workshop planning, Monday 7/14, 10-12 noon

*In terms of the content (I know we're talking tomorrow, but I wanted to give this to you ahead of time)...it seems like the topic in which they, collectively, are most interested (and the topic that has been most neglected in our work together thus far) is the parent/child relationship—specifically the questions of what a parent 'owes' a child (his/her responsibility to the being he has created) and what a child 'owes' a parent.*

*As we've talked about already, they're at the point in the process when they definitely need to be generating material, so any tools for devising theatre would be enormously helpful. I love your idea of employing the dramatic structures you find most productive. They've worked a*

*bit with dramatic structures (specifically progressive tableau building and moving tableau), but most of our other workshops have centered on movement (more abstract) generation. Something like Conscience Alley (as you mentioned before) would be perfect.*

Prior to this email, then, I have given Emilia an overview of all the players have done thus far and asked her how she envisions her workshop—specifically, what tools she would like to introduce (“Conscience Alley,” a Jonothan Neelands and Tony Goode (2000) drama structure, being one). I suggest the content for the workshop based upon what the players have contributed; in our daily closure on Friday, we facilitators ask the players what questions about Shelley’s text still linger, and those are the questions I pass on to Emilia. So although, after a week of work together, the players are beginning to home in on those topics that most interest them (the relationship between Victor and the creature, the humanity of the creature), I deliberately ask Emilia to conduct a workshop around a topic that has been largely unexplored in an effort to encourage divergence. I mention the drama structures to which the players have already been exposed—the progressive tableau building and the moving tableau—in the hope that Emilia will not repeat them. Reflecting on the sequence of teaching artist workshops at the close of the institute, facilitator Allan observes:

I think that we could have given them a little rounder or more filled out package of tools to work with – a little bit, not a lot – just a little bit. And conversely, though, some of the things really benefitted by the reinforcement of multiple exposures. So the fact that [our Tuesday afternoon teaching artist] introduced what he called the Polaroids [progressive tableaux]. And then [our Wednesday afternoon teaching artist] the next day – it was the next day, right? – followed up with something that was almost identical, but had her little spin on it [moving tableaux], and I think it really reinforced it. (IN II)

Allan points to a core tension in the planning of these teaching artist workshops—the conflict between that desire to expose the players to as broad a range of tools (and content) for creation as

possible (a kind of enforced non linearity) and the virtue in repeating and building upon certain tools and content (a progressive linearity). As the facilitator coordinating the teaching artists, I focus almost exclusively on the former: I attempt to give the players as many disparate experiences as possible. When a teaching artist mentions an activity similar to one I have heard from another teaching artist in a planning conversation, I attempt to steer her in an alternate direction; I shy away from *any* repetition in the planning phase, assuming that the players will be bored by duplication. What I come to understand, though, is the difference between duplication and extension: when the players learn to create progressive tableaux on Tuesday and then our Wednesday teaching artist introduces them to moving tableaux underscored by music, they are able to sustain those moving tableaux for ten to fifteen minutes at a time; they are ready to move at length because they have already experimented with static postures. At the end of the first week, Max comments on the sequence of teaching artists:

I think it's miraculous and I want to say it has very little to do with anything other than pure chance...and it's been perfect, and I don't think it has anything to do with the amount of planning we did. I think it has a lot to do with happenstance and the quality of the teaching artists that we've brought in, and that we've fed, I mean, that you've given them some handholds, these, like, little finger holds more than anything to kind of grab onto.  
(IN II)

I feel my eyebrows rise involuntarily when Max says this. The progression of teaching artists is “miraculous”? I repeat this silently, enraged. I think about my multiple emails with each teaching artist, the lengthy phone calls the evenings before every workshop. And yet, in many ways, Max is right: it is “miraculous.” That Wednesday teaching artist never told me that she was going to engage the players in moving tableaux. “We’ll move into the text with our bodies,” she had said over the phone, vaguely. *What exactly does that look like?* I had pressed. She was one of the only teaching artists that summer with whom I had never worked before. “We’ll



figure it out,” she said. *Okay*, I said, and I left it at that. Max continues, talking specifically about our Friday workshop:

Did I know that's what we were gonna do in a movement workshop? No, I had no idea. I had no concept of that and I would be surprised if any of us in the facilitation group knew exactly what [our teaching artist] was gonna do, and she sent out the things about weight. I did not imagine that we were gonna have everybody lie on each other. So I think, to say, I mean, it was, I think it's absolutely perfect the way that's built – progressively. It's built in levels of difficulty and levels of trust and confidence and community. It's built almost like the spiraled curriculum. It's picked up on threads. It's like all those things I think perfectly, and then, they supported this generation of ideas that we have now, but to give anybody credit for that, I think, would be generous and maybe a little bit disingenuous. (IN II)

Our Friday teaching artist was one with whom I had worked before, a professional dancer. She tells me in advance that she has been fascinated by how heavy *Frankenstein* had made her feel as a reader. She wants to lead the players through experiments around weight. She does not tell me what those experiments will look like. But we talk on the phone, and I tell her what the players have been doing all week—about the first movement workshop on Monday, the improvisation work on Tuesday, those moving tableaux on Wednesday. *They seem to be really getting comfortable with one another*, she comments. And then on Friday, she starts with variations on trust falls and ultimately asks the players—students and teachers alike—to lie, chest-to-chest, on top of one another. The players giggle, but they do as she instructs: students lie directly on top of teachers. Teachers lie atop students. Max is right: “I did not imagine that.” The precise way in which our Friday teaching artist built upon the workshops that had come before is not something I could have anticipated. Just as Max says, the success of that workshop “has a lot to do with...the quality of the teaching artist[] that [we] brought in.” That particular teaching artist knows just how much she can ask of the players.

Perhaps it also has to do with the release of control on the part of the facilitators. John, Allan and Max necessarily have to relinquish control, for they are not the ones in contact with the teaching artists. In his first interview, Allan even tells me:

At the beginning, I think I had a difficult time of understanding how such a large number [of workshops] was actually going to happen, that, okay, I've done projects like this in my classroom, but I've never had to go in and acquire the guest artist myself. I contacted organizations and [they] give them to me, so I'm lining up who the guest artists are. I had no clue how that was gonna happen. I still don't really know, because you've done all that work, but I've seen it happen and it's like, "Oh, that's gonna come together." (IN I)

The whole process of setting up the teaching artist workshops extends beyond the reach of my fellow facilitators. I tell them—and myself—that I do not want to bother them with the details. I am just coordinating the logistics, I say, advising the teaching artists on when to arrive, how much time they have to work with the players. Allan suspects otherwise. He tells me in his first interview:

The dramatic experience that you have is something that – I mean, you're really sort of in a very unique position. I've worked with guest artists before, right? But they're usually lacking in pedagogy and so I have to tell them, "This is how you make your creative vision work within the classroom." But you possess both of those. You possess the background and skillset of the guest artist, but the solidly grounded pedagogy, which is arising out of this sort of student-centered approach. (IN I)

When I first transcribe Allan's interview, I excise these lines. *This study is not about me*, I think. *And he's wrong—I do not have the skill set of a guest artist*. Then I start to consider Allan's words in relation to my interactions with our teaching artists: true, I could not conduct a teaching artist workshop myself. But when that teaching artist tells me, *we'll move into the text with our bodies* and nothing more, I do not panic. Maybe it *is* because of my background: maybe it is because I spent those three years in drama school moving into text without words. Maybe it is because I learned, in those years, that not everything can be articulated—and so often, the verbal

explanations of these teaching artists will be necessarily nebulous. In conversations with teaching artists, I have become accustomed to just listening and saying, *Okay*. I have come to understand how critical their autonomy as artists must be.

Again, though, Max is correct: it would be “generous” and “disingenuous” to give any one person credit for the sequence of those teaching artist workshops; there is a significant element of “happenstance.” Yet I would argue that we facilitators open spaces *for* that happenstance to occur. Never do John, Allan or Max ask for the details of any teaching artist workshop in advance, and so never do I have to demand that our teaching artists adhere lockstep to a pre-determined plan. Never do John, Allan and Max attempt to control what will happen during the workshops themselves. Max observes, “The teaching artists...I think they responded to the room, which was very willing to go in any direction” (IN II). The teaching artists bring their distinct skill sets to bear when they enter our summer institute, but they also “[respond] to the room.” Max continues:

You know, that's, like, opportunistic teaching, I guess, for lack of a better way to think of it, and that planning with openness can, this kind of openness and presence in listening...we had really great people and we put them in a room together and watched. And then, as soon as we saw things happening, we started to guide and think more about it and just allow more to happen there. (IN II)

Through our teaching artists, we facilitators invite “happenstance.” Yet with “happenstance,” of course, comes the unknown. John shares:

I'm very excited to be working with all these teaching artists because you've been taking the lead in all of that and setting it up and I feel like I have so much to learn from these people...I feel like my expectations are that I'll be in... I'm excited to do that, but I think it's an important message that we need to send; that we're all on very new ground here and that we're all learners but we're all really risk-takers. (IN I)

John, Allan, Max and I are “all on very new ground here.” We have all collaborated to set up the *conditions* for creation, but the creation itself—that will be the work of the players.

### **Revisiting the Research Question: I**

*How do Performance at the Center facilitators set up the conditions for text-inspired creation?*

The answer, I found, is threefold:

- 1. Facilitators act as muses**—Facilitators offer both the tools (the journals, the ephemera) and the opportunities (the written invitations) for creation. In sending these tools and opportunities prior to the official beginning of the summer institute, facilitators prime players for their *collaborative* multimodal work with Shelley’s text by encouraging *individual* multimodal interaction with the text. Upon entering the institute, players are therefore accustomed to processing the text in non-linguistic modes; the guest teaching artists build upon work that has already begun. The invitations also work to subtly establish a gift culture: players receive these invitations (intended to spark the imagination) with the implicit, unarticulated expectation that they will produce gifts in turn.
- 2. Facilitators structure the process**—This element emerged as the most contentious among the facilitation team, for disagreement persisted over what constituted “structure.” In this particular summer institute, the “structure” stems from the approach to the generation of ideas—it is the structuring of a process rather than the structuring of a product. We facilitators provide the “container”—five and a half days of experimentation followed by one afternoon of carefully orchestrated organization followed by three days of rehearsal and refinement—within which players produce ideas.

And rather than leaping to follow the first line of promising inquiry among the players, we facilitators work in those initial five and half days to design opportunities for divergence. If facilitators notice that players have begun to focus on one particular issue in the text, we deliberately steer the group in an alternate direction; the point is to provoke as many disparate ideas as possible. Tensions within the facilitation team surface primarily when impulses to interfere with this process in order to control outcomes arise.

- 3. Facilitators invite (and defer to) external expertise**—Facilitators invite guest teaching artists to prompt text-inspired creation among the players, and they do not dictate the content of those workshops. Rather, they offer ample context and suggestions (but never demands) for direction in service of workshop design. In the guest teaching artist workshops, facilitators participate *with* players. We facilitators are “learners” and “risk-takers” alongside them.

## Chapter V

### THE INSTITUTE: A CRUCIBLE FOR CREATION

*...we view the reader not as submissive, bending to the author's will,  
but as creative, making meaning rather than finding it...*

-Robert Probst, 1988, p.66

#### **Disequilibrium: A Shifting of Roles**

*It's our first lunchtime and the mood is celebratory. The morning has gone well. Teachers have worked alongside students (you're all players now!) and evidence of their collective brainstorming festoons the room on pieces of chart paper: Humanity, Nature vs. Nurture, Responsibility, Isolation, Is the creature a monster? Is this what happens in the absence of religion? Does acquiring knowledge inevitably lead to destruction? We've set a tone. The players seem excited, engaged. We're ready for our first teaching artists, two members of a dance company, to come in at 1 pm. Towards the end of lunch, teacher players Blythe and Mollie enter the room and hover at the doorway. "Is it okay if we come in?" Blythe finally asks.*

*"Of course," John says.*

*"Can we talk to you?" Mollie asks. She tucks her strawberry blonde hair behind her ear, adjusts her glasses. She looks at Blythe. "We're concerned."*

*"Okay," I say, "Why?"*

*“There are some students who don’t seem to have read the book,” Blythe says. Blythe is matter of fact. A teacher with ten years of experience, she has seen this before.*

*“Right,” Allan says. “You noticed based on your conversations this morning?” The teacher players have been in small groups with student players—in most groups, two teachers in conversation with two students. After a series of quick writes to start the morning in response to facilitator-provided prompts, we ask the players to share their responses as a group and then record their thoughts and questions on those pieces of chart paper.*

*“Yes,” Mollie says. “They—” she pauses, looks again at Blythe— “or we should say one student in particular seems to have a really confused understanding.”*

*“Okay,” Allan says.*

*“So,” Blythe says briskly, “what should we do? Doesn’t comprehension have to come first? Don’t we have a responsibility here?” I exchange glances with John and Allan. Max averts his eyes.*

*“Let’s see,” John says. “Remember, you don’t have to be teachers right now. You’re players. So let’s wait. We know it’s hard. Thank you for telling us.” Blythe’s eyebrows arch.*

*“Are you sure?” she says.*

*“Yes,” John says. “Let’s see.”*

*“Okay,” Mollie says. She nudges Blythe on the arm. “We’ll see you soon.” She and Blythe turn to go—still fifteen minutes before they need to return officially from lunch. As they walk out the door, I notice their heads shaking, back and forth, ever so slightly. No.*

*Allan sighs as soon as they leave the room. “It’s Static. They’re talking about Static,” he says. Both Allan and Blythe have had Static as a student in their high school classrooms. When we were making decisions about student admissions for the program, we*

*hesitated with Static. He's a great kid, a great kid, Allan said. So enthusiastic. Such a strong presence in the room. But he struggles as a reader and he struggles to talk about books. But such a great kid. "They're right," Allan says. "He probably didn't read Frankenstein. Or if he did, he probably didn't really understand it. But he's here, so we'll just have to see, right? I mean, that's all we can do at this point." Allan smiles weakly.*

### **Heating the Contents: Student Player Alex**

Blythe and Mollie may pose this question on Day 1 in reference to Static, but they could be talking about any of the student players. Student player Alex in particular articulates a struggle with Shelley's text. With long brown hair and eyes sparkling behind her glasses, Alex is one of the first student players to volunteer for my focus group. She arrives at the summer institute early each day and raises her hand in every large group discussion. For our ritual reinforcements<sup>8</sup> at the end of each day, Alex takes out her notebook. She has recorded her reinforcements, numbered them. She reads them out in full sentences. Alex is the only player who does this. I think at first that it's an indication of her thoughtfulness and consideration for the other players: she doesn't want to leave anything or anyone out. But as the days go on and the recording and read alouds continue, I start to suspect that Alex *needs* to write her words down. I notice that when she speaks in those large group discussions, her contributions are rife with extended pauses. She seems to be sorting her thoughts.

So to what extent does the work of the summer institute help Alex access the text of *Frankenstein*? Of her pre-institute summer reading of *Frankenstein*, student player Alex reveals:

And I started reading it and as I started to go into it, I would stop at moments that I found really boring and I would go online and I would find people's analysis about that part and

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<sup>8</sup> A ritual adopted from Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts. At the close of each day, players each take turns articulating a moment, activity or person from the day they would like to "reinforce."



so I would read them out and after I found something interesting, I would go back and I would read that part. And that's basically how I got through the book... (SF I)

In my teacher focus group, teachers bemoan their students' use of online resources in the reading of a class text. They think it bespeaks laziness and an unwillingness to grapple with difficult language. They express a fervent desire to figure out how they might move students away from sites like Spark Notes and back to the original text. But Alex indicates that the use of online resources does not necessarily mean that the original text is being ignored. Alex returns to *Frankenstein* following the online reading of "something interesting" in another's analysis; while some students may employ online resources "to relieve the difficulty of reading" (Blythe, TF I), Alex seems to turn to the internet to relieve the *isolation* of reading. She does not want reading to be a wholly independent endeavor.

Alex further clarifies her challenges with the text:

The hardest part for me wasn't exactly the language but it was the context. When I was reading *Frankenstein* it took me a lot of analysis and a long time to figure out at this point where were we in the setting, what was going on in the plot and what was the time period because I was trying to make the connections between the different characters and the different situations and the fact that the book kept switching between different points of view; it started off with Robert Walton and then it turned to Victor Frankenstein and then it was the monster then back to just the transitions, it took a little while to realize that they had happened. (SF I)

While she recognizes that her reading "require[s] the creation of meanings that [are] not completely on the printed page," Alex struggles to use Shelley's text "to create characters and pictures that [go] beyond words" (Wilhelm, 1997, p.88-89). Alex seems to have difficulty building the world of *Frankenstein*. In *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*, Mark J.P. Wolf tells us, "Since stories involve time, space, and causality, every story implies a world in which it takes place...worlds can exist without stories, but stories cannot exist without a world" (p.29). And if stories cannot exist without a world, then they cannot exist

for a student who cannot envision that world. If a student like Alex cannot construct the world within which *Frankenstein* resides, then she has no access to the story. Alex finds that the *invitations to create* sent prior to the summer institute help with this impenetrability: “When I had the journal and the invitations to create made it a lot easier because then I had something specific I could focus on instead of taking it all in at the same time and it made me focus on a specific point, it was more narrow” (SF I). Though Alex describes the invitations as “narrow[ing]”, they actually function to open Shelley’s text for her: the invitations indicate apertures through which Alex can step into—and then help construct—the world of *Frankenstein*.

Alex explains the way in which her reading shifts upon entering the summer institute:

It was really influential to hear other people’s opinions and other people’s views on specific moments when we all got to sit together and talk about a specific moment and hear about it from different perspectives it was really influential in that I learned a lot more...and it helped me understand what was going on in the text a lot more, a lot better and like...being with teacher figures made things a lot more interesting because we got to see things from a more professional, experienced level and it really brought our understanding to a new level. (SF I)

Alex gestures here towards the importance of what Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) would term “legitimate peripheral participation.” Reading *Frankenstein* in the context of the summer institute, Alex joins in a community of practice: “an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.98). Alex indicates that the purpose of this particular community is manifest from the beginning:

We had the show because it gave us something to work for but I think it’s also important to notice that the show wasn’t our main goal. For the first week, all we were doing was we were examining the text and trying to figure out as much as we could about the text and trying to explore and like regroup ourselves and try to become a community and the show didn’t become the main focus until a couple of days before. (SF II)

While Alex takes care to emphasize that during that first week “all we were doing was...examining the text” because “the show wasn’t our main goal,” it was, in fact, the summer institute’s main goal: the players know that they are examining the text in service of that upcoming show. The players maintain a need “to figure out as much as [they can] about the text” throughout that first week because they have a task at hand: they have to create a performance piece, and those 14,085 minutes are quickly ticking away.

Upon entering the summer institute, players step into a community of practice formed around a goal of production. They may not be producing coats, like Lave and Wenger’s tailors, but the community functions in a similar fashion. Lave and Wenger explain that in the case of tailors, the apprentice tailor learns not from his master (for “an apprentice’s own master is too distant, an object of too much respect, to engage with in awkward attempts at a new activity”) but from the apprentice who knows just a little more than he does—perhaps the apprentice who knows how to secure buttons (1991, p.92). The apprentice does not teach his fellow apprentice to sew buttons explicitly; the newer apprentice learns through observation, through legitimate peripheral participation. As Lave and Wenger note, “...newcomers’ legitimate peripherality provides them with more than an ‘observational’ lookout post: it crucially involves participation as a way of learning—of both absorbing and being absorbed in—the ‘culture of practice’” (1991, p.95). The apprentice learns by working alongside the more experienced apprentice.

In much the same way, student players like Alex learn about the text of *Frankenstein* from their own ‘observational’ lookout posts: by working alongside the teacher players. Though they may be “masters” of textual analysis in their own classrooms, teacher players are not “masters” in the summer institute, for the final “product” is not textual analysis. It is a theatrical

production, a production (and a process leading to a production) that not one teacher player has experienced before; all teacher players are apprentices in this community of practice. Yet they are one step ahead of the student players. Student player Kim shares:

I think being exposed to teachers from across the world, it's very, um, it enlightens me in particular I guess because I had a very jaded vision of how I'd like to apply the book to society that's how I took my notes in the journal and it really kind of had different opinions and it taught me a lot of new literary devices that I didn't really know about beforehand, so...(SF I)

Kim learns varying opinions and “a lot of new literary devices that [he] didn't really know about beforehand” from these teacher players. He learns, we might say, to sew on a button. For those “opinions” and literary devices may not produce a “coat”—they may not be enough to create that final theatrical production—but they may become useful in *making* the coat. And I would argue that Kim learns those literary devices because he finds them useful; he sees their connection to the larger project at hand. In the summer institute, just as Lave and Wenger point out in communities of practice like the tailors: “...there is very little observable teaching; the more basic phenomenon is learning...there are strong goals for learning because learners, as peripheral participants, can develop a view of what the whole enterprise is about, and what there is to be learned” (1991, p.92-3).

Critical in cultivating this legitimate peripheral participation among the players is the eradication of overt distinctions between students and teachers (*you're all players now*, John tells the summer institute participants on the first day). Alex says, “The fact that we got to call each other by our first names, gave it the feel that we were all in the same plane, that we were all on the same level and so we could express our ideas without having fear of having them be oppressed or like ridiculed” (SF II). Alex's choice of words here proves significant: the fact that students and teachers—as players—are able to call each other by their first names “gave it the

*feel* that [they] were all on the same plane” [italics mine]. She does not say that they *are*, in fact, on the same plane; she still senses a distinction. Perhaps what Alex alludes to here, though, is the way in which “playerhood” decenters teacher as “master.” When the student players no longer see teacher players as “masters,” they are able “to engage with [them] in awkward attempts at a new activity” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.92). Student players are able to venture opinions on the text of *Frankenstein* that they might not share otherwise because they see those teachers not as equals but as fellow learners—more advanced fellow learners immersed in the same “enterprise.”

Working alongside the teacher players, however, becomes just one influence on Alex’s reading. She describes still other aspects of the summer institute that impact her understanding of Shelley’s text:

Once we started to do soundscaping and movement and to express the words, I went back, and I kind of like skimmed through the story again, and in the margins, I wrote what I would do to represent this particular moment, like what kind of soundscape and what kind of movement I would do. (SF II)

Suddenly, Alex is attempting to not just respond but to *read* through her body, an entry into reading modeled by many of the teaching artists. Earlier on Day 3, our morning teaching artist, a vocalist, crafts her workshop around moments of sound in *Frankenstein*: the primal sounds emanating from the creature as he comes to life, the singing of Safie that so captivates the creature as he looks in on the DeLancey family. She has read the novel through sound. By way of contrast, our Day 5 teaching artist is a professional dancer. She prefaces her workshop by saying, “While I was reading this book, I just felt so heavy”; her workshop centers around explorations of weight sharing. In the planning phases of the summer institute, John says, “I see the teaching artists as coming in to demonstrate moments of possibility” (IN I). He clarifies that

these are moments of possibility for teaching, opportunities for the teacher players to experiment with alternate pedagogical approaches to text.

But I would suggest that the teaching artists—perhaps even more significantly—demonstrate moments of possibility for *reading*, for their teaching arises from their own readings of the text. One teaching artist consistently asks herself, “What do I *hear*?” Another asks, “What do I *feel in my body*?” And these, in turn, become questions that players like Alex can ask when they return to Shelley’s text. The answers to these questions might at first appear too simplistic, too personal: “I hear birds singing here,” “I feel a twitching in my left hand when I read this phrase.” *So what?* we might say. Yet I contend that an awareness of these kinds of visceral responses has the potential to catalyze a recursive reading process, prodding players to return to the text. For when student player Alex reads a particular sentence in Shelley’s text and writes in the margin, “Left hand twitching,” she validates her body as a locus of meaning making; she envisions her left hand twitching for a reason. The next step, then, is to find out why. Alex’s initial reading inspires the visceral response, and the visceral response prompts a re-reading, Alex all the while burrowing ever more deeply into Shelley’s text. Alex tells me:

My aha moment was when so we see this really apparent theme throughout the entire book is that [Frankenstein] really wants to be loved. We start out with the letters where Robert Walton is talking and all he’s talking about is that all he wants is a friend and then we hear from Victor Frankenstein and when he goes to University or when he’s growing up, all he’s really grateful for is his friend Henry Clerval, and so we see that there’s this theme going on that everyone needs friendship, and everyone is very grateful for the fact that they have someone who supports them and is always there for them and an aha moment was when Victor Frankenstein destroyed the companion even though he knew that he was destroying the possibility of the creature’s only friend and I thought it was beautifully ironic that the one thing he needed for himself was the one thing he was taking away from somebody else. (SF I)

This “really apparent theme” surfaces only *after* Alex begins to experience the novel through sound and movement. Two days prior, she has heard a soundscape crafted by a small group of players to represent Robert Walton. Throughout the soundscape (a series of footfalls and

rhythmic sighs punctuated by loud clapping), two players sing a plaintive refrain: *Somebody find me a friend, somebody find me a friend*. Alex knows now (because the soundscape creators have explained) that Robert Walton is looking for a friend. So then she returns to Shelley's text. She starts re-reading passages about Victor Frankenstein and passages about the creature, that refrain—*somebody find me a friend*—all the while echoing in her head. She begins noticing the correspondence among these characters because she has been primed to notice. One group's text-inspired creation has enabled Alex to see parts of Shelley's text that she has not seen before.

In our focus group on Friday of the first week, teacher player Mollie observes:

I've been watching a kid throughout this week who at the beginning was struggling very much with super basic comprehension and now I'm watching him after having interacted with everyone else, interacted with the text in a number of different ways, have these very complicated and in depth and text based opinions about characters and so I'm just kind of curious about how something like this shifts that. (TF I)

Mollie, of course, is talking not about Alex but about Static. But Alex's experience may help us to understand "how something like this [institute] shifts that": the summer institute coaxes Alex gradually into the text of *Frankenstein*. The *invitations to create* open doorways for possible entry. The teacher players grasp her hands and gently pull her—perhaps sometimes stumbling—across thresholds into the text. And then her fellow players' text-inspired creations (like the soundscape) prompt Alex to look around inside that text—to notice finally some of its bearing walls. This process, however, takes time; Alex does not enter into the text—and so might not be said to "comprehend" *Frankenstein*—immediately. Comprehension, for Alex, does not come "first," an isolated act finished and left behind. For Alex—and, we might infer, for Static—the summer institute becomes a site of ongoing *comprehending*.

### **Bodies in Motion: Teacher Players Emily, Jessica & Blythe**

*The players work with focus, sitting on the floor in close circles hunched over their copies of Frankenstein. We're in the midst of a "Hidden Voice Monologue" workshop. Allan, Max and I have identified six characters from the text who appear underdeveloped in Shelley's narrative—Henry Clerval, Justine Moritz, Elizabeth Lavenza, Alphonse Frankenstein, M. Waldman, and Robert Walton—and the players have chosen character names from a bowl to divide into groups (four to five players in each character group). The groups are now finding and recording every reference that Shelley makes to their given character (roughly: "What do we know?") and then brainstorming a list of questions they would like to ask their character ("What would we like to know?"). Later, they will step into role as their selected character and improvise answers to those questions in preparation for the drafting of character monologues.*

*"Adele?" Emily says. "Can you come here a minute?" An elementary school teacher from Seattle, Emily introduces herself with light hearted self deprecation on Day 1: "I'm Emily from Seattle, and acting is definitely not my thing. So this should be interesting!" She sits on the carpet now with one leg tucked in and one outstretched, her feet bare. "We're having a little trouble," she says. Her group members murmur in agreement. "We have Alphonse Frankenstein."*

*"Ah, yes," I say, "Frankenstein's dad. Okay, hmmm..." I pause for a moment. "Well, you want to think about those gaps and spaces, right? Are there any parts where Mary Shelley seems to leave out information? Oh, I know," I say, thinking suddenly of one of the invitations I had penned prior to the institute, "You can think about that part where Shelley talks about how Alphonse and Caroline Beaufort meet. Her father dies and Alphonse takes her away to Geneva*



*to live with a relative and then Shelley says something like, 'Two years later Caroline became his wife.' Well, I would want to know what happened during those two years, right?"*

*"Got it," Jessica, a petite teacher from Taiwan says, flashing me a quick smile. "Thanks. We'll keep working on this."*

*I reconvene with Allan and Max at the front of the room. "Some of them seem a little stuck," I say. "What do you think we should do?"*

*"Maybe they need to move," Allan suggests. It wasn't part of our plan.*

*"In character?" I say. Allan and Max nod. "Give me a couple of minutes," I say. I flip over our daily agenda, and rapidly, messily, jot down some prompts:*

*-Before you begin to walk, close your eyes. See your favorite place in the world. When you open your eyes, walk towards it.*

*-Somewhere on your body, you're carrying a picture of the person you love most. When I ask you to stop walking, pause. Take out that picture, look at it. Put it away. Keep walking.*

*-You're walking in front of a crowd of people. Think about what part of your body you're most proud of. Show it off.*

*-You're walking in front of that same crowd of people. Think about what part of your body you most want to hide. Don't let them see it...*

*"Ready," I tell Allan and Max.*

*"All right," Allan announces to the players. "Let's get on our feet. You're going to step into your characters now. We're going to move..."*

EMILY: I really, I really appreciated the work at the beginning how we walked in the character's shoes because then, with those prompts that you were giving us as we were moving, I was like ooh...how would he, what part of his body would he be wanting to hide? And what is he proud of? I'd never thought of it that way and the first reading of

the book I hadn't thought much of Frankenstein's dad. I kind of thought you know when he becomes interested in Cornelius Agrippa and he's like—ugh, that's trash, you know right there I was like, oh, he's a jerk, then I didn't really think much more about him and then today I was like, oh wait, you know he was actually like a really caring father who I think cared deeply about his family and you know it was important to him so how would he feel about what Victor went off to do and pursue in his life. It gave a whole different perspective on that relationship. (TF)

Teacher player Emily remarks on how the workshop forces her to grapple with a character she would have otherwise dismissed as “a jerk” and, in so doing, uncover layers in Alphonse Frankenstein that she might never have noticed otherwise. Emily refers to walking in Alphonse Frankenstein's shoes as the moment at which her interest in him was piqued: as she steps into his body, Alphonse Frankenstein both literally and figuratively becomes three-dimensional. Interestingly, she calls this walking exercise “work at the beginning” of the “Hidden Voice Monologue” session and yet, as we can see through the workshop sequence, it comes after significant group work pulling information and questions from the text. Maybe, though, we can see this as an indication of the movement work as “the beginning” of Emily's understanding of Alphonse, an understanding that does not seem to arise from work with the text through reading and discussion. Or maybe, as teacher player Blythe suggests, we cannot so easily separate the movement from that reading and discussion:

I guess what was good about this is that there was the theatre activity of walking around the room and embodying the character and starting to think about those things but then I had to go back, it motivated me to go back into the text and look for those pieces, so I was doing this rereading, recursive process of digging into the character and through that I also asked other questions like how old is she and how do I know how old she is and it really encouraged me to go back and flesh out a lot about the book that I didn't think about, like this idea of goodness and benevolence in women and religion which I don't think we talked about... (TF)

The movement becomes part of a “recursive process” of rereading: the players read, move, and reread in tandem. Movement propels these teacher players—like student player Alex—not away from, but back into the text. Teacher player Jessica shares:

[Emily and I] were in the same [Alphonse Frankenstein] group and yeah, I just, I think you know walking like the character made me realize so many things, like first of all, I started walking like this (*eyes to the ceiling, up straight*) so I realized, oh, he's kind of proud and that didn't come out when we were doing all that literary analysis like that didn't really come out and then the prompt about, you know, what would you hide, I imagined that I had a pot belly, he would have a pot belly and kind of hide that and then I realized is he doing these things 'cause he's really good or cause he wants to be seen a certain way and that you know made me think differently and then later I came up with this backstory that it did say in the novel that he had a previous relationship before he met Caroline and I thought about the type of girl he would go for, maybe that type of girl had the same ambitions as Victor, you know this kind of wild, imaginative person and maybe he was like that made me think 'cause it just seems like he's too perfect you know, he's lived this virtuous life, did public service, so it just gave so much depth to his character 'cause I didn't think about him so much when I was reading. (TF)

In completing what Jessica calls “all that literary analysis” prior to moving around the room in character, the players write down what Shelley tells them about their character directly—the observable facts. Yet the spontaneous, improvised movement activity reveals that the players “know” far more about their characters than those objective facts. Or perhaps it is not that they have always known these things about their characters (and have simply failed to articulate them in the “literary analysis” stage), but that the movement activity helps them to form—to compose—those meanings. As Ann Berthoff (1981) reminds us:

We don't have ideas that we put into words; we don't think of what we want to say and then write. In composing, we make meanings. We find the forms of thought by means of language, and we find forms of language by taking thought. (p.69)

Teacher players Emily, Blythe and Jessica find “forms of thought” not by means of language, but by means of movement; movement becomes an act of composition. They go on, of course, to articulate their thinking in words, but the thought emerges first in their bodies and then—only then—do they begin to put that thought into language. James Moffett (1988) tells us that “sustained attention to inner speech reveals ideas one did not know one thought, unsuspected connections that illuminate both oneself and the outside objects of one's thought” (p.148). Jessica suggests that the movement activity provides just this kind of sustained

attention, an opportunity for her *body* to reveal “ideas [she] did not know [she] thought.” Still further, David Bartholomae (1986) contends that understanding a text is “not an act of recognition” but “initiated by a response and justified by the elaboration or extension of that response” (p.91). So Jessica does not recognize that Alphonse Frankenstein is a proud man in first reading the text, but responds to the text through movement in such a way (hiding his “pot belly”) that reveals pride, a kinesthetic response she then elaborates and extends when she generates—in writing—the backstory of Alphonse’s previous marriage. This backstory, in turn, reveals a depth of understanding around Victor and Alphonse’s relationship and a potential reason that, as Emily would say, Alphonse acts as such “a jerk.” “Intellectual labor,” Peter McLaren (1988) declares, has “little affective currency [when] it [is] removed from any celebration of the body as a locus of meaning” (p.169). Reflecting upon her own experience over the course of the first week, Emily tells me:

In general, I’m just kind of interested in the idea of movement in classrooms and what that does for brain activity and helping kids remember and understand their environment and what they’re reading so a lot of the movement pieces for this I’m taking away I think. (TF)

Teacher players Emily, Jessica and Blythe all experience ways in which the body can become a site of intellectual labor. So, too, do student players Static and Bailey.

### **Bodies in Motion: Static & Bailey**

*At 1 pm as planned on Day 1, the teaching artists begin. We gather on the floor in front of them, seated, with pens in hand. They pass out a brief piece of text from Frankenstein:*

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriations only formed a

more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (Chapter 5)

*As they read the text aloud, the teaching artists ask us (for we facilitators participate with the players) to underline those words or phrases that stand out. “Ideas?” the lead teaching artist asks. “What did you underline?” We call out suggestions, and, as a group, narrow the list to four—catastrophe, the wretch, infinite pains, formed. “Excellent,” the lead teaching artist says. “Now let’s spread out around the room.” We each find our own space on the floor, standing, looking in various directions. “I’m going to call out a word or phrase,” the lead teaching artist continues, “And you let that move you. Create a movement.” My heart has begun to beat rapidly. Just do it, I tell myself silently.*

*Bailey, a student player with dark eyeliner, is not so silent. “What?” she yelps. “We’re dancing?” I hear laughter around the room.*

*“You’re moving,” the lead teaching artist says, “That’s it. We’re all doing it. No one’s looking at anyone else. We’re just seeing what happens.” Bailey’s eyes widen. “Okay,” the lead teaching artist says. In succession, she calls out our instructions—catastrophe, the wretch, infinite pains, forming, destruction of the thing formed. As I twist and lunge, I can feel the players moving around me. There’s still laughter. We string these movements together in a progression, practicing on our own unique string of movements simultaneously around the room, making each larger, then smaller, faster, then slower, all in accordance with the teaching artist’s instructions. There’s just breathing now. Over the course of the two hours, we teach one another our movements, generate collaborative movement sequences, and finally work in three smaller groups to create longer movement compositions interpolating individual movement progressions with group sequences.*

*I sit against the windows to watch the final group present. Static figures prominently in the movement composition, the centerpiece around which the rest of his group members revolve. At points, he arches his back, throws himself to the ground, raises his hands, then his eyes to the ceiling, every part of him committed. Watching him riff on Victor Frankenstein's moment of creation through movement, I feel exhilaration, tension, anxiety. He is mesmerizing.*

*"Thoughts?" the lead teaching artist asks as the last group concludes. "What did that bring up for you?"*

*Bailey raises her hand. "Can I just say that Static was amazing?" she says. She turns to Static. "I mean, watching you, I felt how painful this moment of creation was, you know? Like, for Victor? Like how many conflicting emotions he felt? I never really understood that until I saw you move like that. Did you spend a lot of time reading that part of the book?" Static shrugs, sheepish.*

*"I don't know," Static says, "I just kind of did what the words said, you know, what I felt when she was calling out the words. But yeah, it was like an intense moment."*

*"Well, whatever you did," Bailey says, "Thank you. It really helped me."*

*"Cool," Static says. I glance over at Mollie, then at Blythe. They are looking at Static, nodding.*

Howard Gardner (2011) would likely characterize Static, at ease and eager to move when given the opportunity, as a classic "bodily-kinesthetic" learner. Mollie and Blythe mark Static's confused understanding of the text that first morning; at that point, he has not yet been given the opportunity to exercise his "bodily-kinesthetic" intelligence. When required to engage with *Frankenstein* solely as a linguistic learner (through that first individual reading of the text and then a group discussion), Static appears lost. But as soon as he can activate and access that

intrinsic bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (and important to note here is that the prompts for movement in the workshop are single words), Static can enter the conversation around *Frankenstein*; he has something to say.

This is not new or revelatory, though; Gardner has been advocating for classroom activities to engage multiple intelligences for over thirty years (his first edition of *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* was published in 1983). An examination of Static, however, reveals that this is about more than engagement. The ability to use his body helps Static to engage with *Frankenstein* (responding as he is to one word or phrase at a time), yes, and it seems to lead him to an understanding of the text (or at least particular words in the text) that he does not evidence at first. But the benefits of inviting Static's bodily-kinesthetic intelligence into the room extend far beyond Static. *I never really understood [that part of Frankenstein] until I saw you move like that*, Bailey tells him. In my fieldnotes, I record: "Student as kinesthetic teacher as opposed to kinesthetic learner (Static, who is learning about the text himself through our activities, but is also teaching others)" (FN, 7/10).

I write "as opposed to" not because Static's teaching and learning are at odds, but because so frequently the notion of engaging multiple intelligences in the classroom centers solely on reaching students who preference learning styles outside of the dominant "linguistic" and "logical-mathematical." Teacher player Ruby, in fact, observes at the end of the first week:

I've been thinking a lot about ownership of the text, and I think it's important to hit multiple intelligences, it's important to invite different types of learning into your classroom, even if you have the advanced class and you think they're ready to just sit there and learn their, you know for their test, I think there are so many different ways to engage so many different learners, I think that this is a very inclusive way of getting so many people to feel their own individual ownership of the text and I think that would be very motivating to read. (TF I)

Ruby views the inclusion of multiple modes as a way of “engag[ing] so many different learners”; a teacher with Static in the English classroom might include a kinesthetic activity expressly to help him access a text. But what this conception of multiple intelligences ignores is what *other* players might learn from witnessing Static’s alternative engagement with the text. Teacher player Mollie observes, “We make art to figure out the world and we look at art to try and understand the way that other people see the world and to help us see the world differently, right?” (IN I) When the summer institute invites Static to “make art” (through movement) “to figure out the [text],” he has the opportunity to compose meaning.

Just as significantly, though, other players like Bailey have the chance “to try and understand” how Static sees *Frankenstein* and to maybe see the text a little differently themselves. Of her pre-institute reading of *Frankenstein*, Bailey, a rising senior with chin length sandy hair says:

It’s always difficult to kind of be forced to read something and enjoy it on your own will even if it’s a great book like *Frankenstein*. And I think the thing that’s kind of hard about reading for me and I think in general is kind of like the ending. Like if I get really attached to a book and its story, then like the ending always hits hard because it’s always open ended no matter what happens so just kind of like I don’t know, I always get really emotionally attached to the books I read. (SF I)

Bailey shares this response in the context of our first student focus group. Though she attempts to echo the struggle the other students express in their reading of *Frankenstein* (“it’s always difficult to kind of be forced to read”), Bailey betrays an ease in her own reading: she bemoans not the challenge of the text but the fact that it ends. She has been able to “get really emotionally attached” to the text, suggesting that she has little trouble entering into the world of *Frankenstein*. Still, however, Bailey tries to find affinity with her fellow struggling student players:



I also definitely had that kind of staying focused, that was difficult because me personally description kind of gets boring, I always like to go to the dialogue and in this book...there was just so much description and...I did it in two sittings, it took like four hours for each sitting, so that was really hard but I found myself really like towards the end kind of interested in it and kind of yeah. (SF I)

Though she purports to have difficulty “staying focused,” Bailey hints at what helps her to enter Shelley’s text with such facility: “I always like to go to the dialogue.” I have worked with Bailey before in the context of our high school theatre company. I know that she aspires to be a professional actress. And here she suggests that she approaches *Frankenstein* as an actress—Bailey looks for the dialogue (the play script) and envisions the scenes accordingly (an approach with which she is quite accustomed). Bailey knows how to build a fictional world from text because her work as an actress requires it.

While comfortable with the mental work of constructing a textual world, Bailey feels distinctly uncomfortable with the movement demanded by the Day 1 teaching artists. A teacher designing a lesson with multiple intelligences in mind likely would not include a kinesthetic activity to engage Bailey, for she does not evidence a preference for kinesthetic learning. Yet the Day 1 kinesthetic activity *does* end up engaging Bailey as it enables her to “hear” (or rather, see) Static’s response to Shelley’s text, a response to which she might not otherwise have been privy. Though Bailey already “understands” Victor’s moment of creation (in that she knows that there exists a moment in the text in which Victor’s creature animates), only through Static does she begin to comprehend the complexity of that moment for Victor—the simultaneous conflicting emotions his creation engenders.

Still further, because those Day 1 teaching artists present their kinesthetic approach to *Frankenstein* as the only way players can engage with the text on that particular afternoon, Bailey must participate. She cannot choose from an array of options designed to appeal to

various kinds of intelligence and rest comfortable in a non-kinesthetic approach; she must confront her discomfort. Later in the week, Bailey shares:

I was writing something based on what we did with the creature a couple of days ago and I can't remember how I started writing a monologue from the creature's point of view and one thing I realized was that kind of going back to the idea that we talked about, the reason that the creature was considered a monster from the get go was because he was ugly and I also saw that in like some of the performances that the reason nobody loved him was because he was ugly because he was very articulate and very warm and loved everyone else but because he looked like a monster, people treated him like a monster...I think a couple of days ago we did the inner monologues of the creature and we also did some tableaux and just thinking about it afterwards...kind of led to that. (SF I)

Bailey's monologue emerges from a number of sources: an "idea we talked about," things she noticed "in like some of the performances," her own "inner monologue" (an exercise in which we read a passage from Shelley's text together and then asked the players to write in the voice of the creature based upon what occurred), "some tableaux," and finally "just thinking about it afterwards." So Bailey talks, she listens, she watches, she writes, she moves, she thinks. She allows each one of these experiences to re-vise her initial reading of *Frankenstein* ("I was calling the creature the monster before I started [the summer institute], before I started discussing it and then I saw it's the creature, I should call it the creature...so just so many more ideas and it made me think a lot deeper") (SF I). The process of monologue writing is not necessarily linear, but Bailey suggests that it is cumulative; her final text-inspired creation becomes a remix of all the variegated ways that she has had to encounter Shelley's text. Both Static and Bailey must literally *move* into their understandings of *Frankenstein*.

### **Production**

*We launch our session on Monday of the second week with a writing prompt for the players:*

*Individually write down what you want the audience to take away from the show:*

- *“I want the audience to walk out understanding...”*
- *“I want the audience to walk out feeling...”*

*The players write, share with a partner, then share with the whole group. We make a lengthy collective list of all that we want the audience to walk out understanding and feeling (we want the audience to understand the perspective of the creature, we want the audience to feel empathy for Elizabeth and Justine). Dividing the players into small groups, Allan, Max and I give every group a stack of half sheets of paper, each half sheet naming a particular “episode” generated during the course of the first week (creature awakes through primal sound, soundscape of the beginning of the show; each stack contains a different set of episodes so that the selection process to follow can be as efficient as possible).*

*We ask the players to review the episodes one by one, rating their development on a scale of 1 to 3 (3 being ready for the final performance, 1 or 2 being in need of further refinement; this will help us to create priorities for our rehearsals the next day) and discussing and recording what the audience might understand or feel through the given episode. Based upon their discussions, the groups form a pile of episodes that must be in the final performance (so well do they work to bring about those desired audience understandings and feelings), regardless of their level of development. The groups deposit the other episodes in an area of the room we dub “The Pool of Possibility”; those episodes in the “Pool” may become part of the final performance, but they do not appear to align with our intended aims on a first pass.*

*After the initial sorting process, the “Mary Shelley Game Show” rests in the “Pool of Possibility.” Yet when we ask players to begin sequencing the episodes that they have chosen to be in the final performance and draw from the “Pool” as necessary to fill in any perceived gaps, Sami immediately picks up the game show half sheet. “Wait,” I say, “Are you sure you want*

*that one to be in the performance?” Sami says that she definitely wants it in the performance. “But does it accomplish any of that?” I say. I gesture towards our list of performance objectives.*

*“Probably not,” Sami says. “But I helped make it.” She pushes apart two slips of paper on the floor, parts of the final show sequence, and places the “Mary Shelley Game Show” squarely between them. “There!” she says. She flounces away.*

In his study of creativity, interviewing ninety-one individuals deemed to be “exceptional” in their respective fields (“exceptional” for the difference their contributions have made to their chosen domain), Csikszentmihalyi (2013) explains what separates creative people from their peers. Creative individuals, he says, pointing to creative scientists as a particular example, can distinguish between a good idea and a bad idea; they know when not to go down a certain road and waste time (p.115). Considering my interaction with Sami, I think at first that this is the issue at hand: Sami does not know the difference between a good and bad idea (or the difference between a “more” and “less productive” idea). Upon further reflection, however, I realize that before any individual might be able to distinguish a more from a less productive idea, he or she must be able to dissociate that idea from the self. Teacher player Blythe says:

*If your product is performance, it’s for the audience, right? How do you assess what’s valuable or important for an audience to know or to see or to feel or to think about? How can you best execute that? But I guess having that self awareness that right now the question we’re asking is not about you, it’s about this, and I think that’s hard. (IN I)*

The “self awareness” to which Blythe refers seems to be an understanding that the judgment passed on an idea is not a judgment passed on the self. Sami refuses to let go of the game show because she was part of its creation; the idea becomes an extension of her. When we cast that idea into the “Pool of Possibility”—essentially dismissing it—we, in a certain sense, dismiss her. She will not allow that to happen. But it must happen, for when we ask whether the game

show is (for the sake of simplicity) a good or bad idea, “right now the question we’re asking is not about you, it’s about this,” as Blythe reminds us. Choices must be made in service of the final performance piece.

MacGregor, Tate and Robinson (1977) caution against the use of performance in the classroom: “There is a danger in encouraging children to produce an end-product...it may inhibit the natural development of the work and often forces children to cut short explorations and prematurely find forms of expression which can result in work of a superficial nature” (p.30). And performance inevitably will do exactly that—it will “cut short explorations” (the perpetuation of divergent thinking) in its call for convergence. Through performance, the players must synthesize all that they have explored, paring down ideas as they “think of ways of communicating outward from and through the group” (MacGregor, Tate & Robinson, 1977, p.19). Simultaneously, though, performance may encourage the *start* of those very explorations it tends to cut short. Student player Kim explains:

The way I see it is the performance was both inspiring and liberating at the same time...it’s very creative and it’s inspiring because it gave you a reason to create. It was a muse, to create remixes or get that spark in your mind. (SF II)

Kim suggests that rather than inhibiting work, the looming performance gives players “a reason to create,” implying that work emerged in anticipation of the performance that might not otherwise have been produced. Student player Bailey echoes Kim in her endorsement of performance as a catalyst for creation:

I also think that a lot of the work that we did was because we had the performance. Like a lot of people wanted to get it out soon so we could like, I think if this performance was like three weeks it would have been completely different. And I think because there was a performance in mind, maybe the performance itself wasn’t as important but it helped inspire a lot of great work. (SF II)

And yet Bailey alludes to the way in which performance also limits the work produced: “if this performance was like three weeks it would have been completely different.” The nine-day time

constraint necessarily bounds the work generated; the relative depth or superficiality of the performance depends upon how much time players can devote to their chosen explorations. If the players initiate a particular exploration on Day 1, then perhaps they can fully develop the idea by the performance on Day 9. But if an idea emerges in nascent form on Day 5, there might not be time to see how it might develop. Maybe “The Mary Shelley Game Show” could have been part of a performance with a three week gestation period. But we had only three days remaining.

*“Are you ready to get up and try that again?” I say. It’s Tuesday afternoon of our second week together. We’re working in small groups to rehearse a movement section of the show.*

*“Wait—” Kim says. “I have something. It’s new. I wrote it last night.”*

*“You have to read it,” student player Bailey says, tossing her hair over one shoulder. “Come on. We really want to hear it.” Kim looks around the circle. We are all sitting on the floor, watching him, nodding.*

*“It’s a monologue,” Kim says, opening up his journal and smoothing one of the pages towards the end. He begins to read, just barely audible, clutching his legs to his chest. He’s speaking as Victor Frankenstein, about his need to redeem himself and his family, about his inability to predict the power of the being he had created. When Kim finishes, he continues to stare at the page.*

*“Wow,” Bailey says, and we all murmur in agreement. “Wow. That has to be in the show.” Kim doesn’t look up.*

*“It sort of came to me in the middle of the night,” he says.*

*“Let’s figure out a place for it, okay?” I say.*

“Okay,” he says. *Kim puts his journal on the floor and hugs both legs to his chest even more tightly.*

ALEX: In my opinion it was a good thing that we had the show because it gave us something to work for but I think it’s also important to notice that the show wasn’t our main goal. For the first week, all we were doing was we were examining the text and trying to figure out as much as we could about the text and trying to explore and like regroup ourselves and try to become a community and the show didn’t become the main focus until a couple of days before it which I think was a really smart idea because if you’re not focusing the entire program on the show then it gives room for...ideas and development and stuff like that. (SF II)

Though Alex contends that for the first week, the players are just “try[ing] to become a community and the show didn’t become the main focus until a couple of days before it,” I would suggest that the players try to become a community precisely because the show is imminent; they have a *need* to forge bonds. They *need* to accept and build upon one another’s ideas. As Lewis Hyde (1983) observes:

...[there are] several reasons why ideas might be treated as gifts, the first being that the task of assembling a mass of disparate facts into a coherent whole clearly lies beyond the powers of a single mind or even a single generation. All such broad intellectual undertakings call for a community of scholars, one in which each individual thinker can be awash in the ideas of his comrades so that a sort of ‘group mind’ develops, one that is capable of cognitive tasks beyond the powers of any single person. (p.1687)

Hyde points to the scientific community as an intellectual locus of gift culture:

...[for] the ends of science require coordination...each individual’s work must ‘fit,’ and the synthetic nature of gift exchange makes it an appropriate medium for this integration; it is not just people that must be brought together but the ideas themselves. (p.1687)

In the same way, the creation of a performance piece inspired by *Frankenstein* demands “not just people that must be brought together but the ideas themselves.” The broad task of assembling a coherent final piece “clearly lies beyond the powers of a single mind.” It becomes a cognitive (and physical) task necessitating more than any one person.

*All of the players are dressed black. Twenty minutes until showtime. Facilitators and players stand facing one another in a circle on the stage. Teacher player Emily and I make eye contact. “Yes?” she says.*

*“Yes,” I say. She begins to move towards me. I lock eyes with Blythe. “Yes?” I say.*

*“Yes,” she responds. I move towards her just as Emily takes my place. Blythe asks permission of another player, and that player of another, that player of another, bodies crossing the circle, spaces opened and filled. Yes? Yes. Yes? Yes.*

*Later, we’re halfway through the show. I pace in the back of the Chapel. The air is hot and moist. We had to hold the start of the show because audience members kept pouring in; we’re well beyond the fire code. Teacher player Ethan is just finishing his remix. In role as the creature, he watches as student player Jake and teacher player Ruby move towards one another on the stage, soaring music underscoring their embrace. Ethan turns away from them, out to the audience, and slides to the floor, face contorted in pain. The music stops and he gets up and exits the stage in silence. Purposefully. This is all planned. Student player Alex’s remix, a video is next. The screen is dark. “What is happening?” I hiss at Isaac, our technical director. Isaac frantically presses buttons. All of the audio and video worked flawlessly for the dress rehearsal that afternoon.*

*“We don’t have a signal,” Isaac hisses back. “It’s not going to work.” The Chapel is silent. I look to my right and my left. Players line the back of the Chapel, all turned towards us, eyes emanating in alarm. Then: a low, steady sound. Blythe walks on stage alone, carrying a chair, humming. Teacher player Liz begins singing, You’re lovely, absolutely lovely... Alex, sitting on the stairs next to the stage, begins a maniacal laugh.*

**ALEX:** This was done with no words. No sound of communication. Just eye contact. This moment, for me, was indescribable. This moment was when the group passed the



figurative test that verified our ability to label ourselves as one collective company. This moment was beautiful, another favorite of mine. Due to the fact that we glossed over the glitch as smoothly as we could, it removed some of the tension that had built up between my shoulders due to the fact that my remix wasn't going to be played. I thought this was spectacular. (SF II)

*All of the remaining marionettes and puppeteers take their places. Boom. Boom. The drum summons them to life. The show goes on.*

*“Almost over,” Allan whispers. He stands next to me at the back of the Chapel. Kim is alone on stage, nearing the end of his monologue as Victor Frankenstein.*

**KIM:** Interpretive dancing and primal noise...they just seem too experimental for my taste. In theory and intention, they work in the context, but I'm not too keen on them. Perhaps that's just me who doesn't like to dance at all. (WR)

For much of the summer institute, Allan and I have worried about Kim. He enters the two weeks not knowing any of the other student players; he applied to the institute because his favorite teacher, Daniel, encouraged him and was coming as a teacher player himself. Kim has spent much of his time with his arms crossed, shoulders stooped and head down, peering at the rest of the group over the tops of his wire rim glasses.

*Allan nudges my arm. “Hey,” he says. “Look.” I look down at the stage. Kim gazes directly into the center of the rows of seats as he speaks, light winking in the lenses of his glasses. Both of his arms reach out to the audience.*

### **The Cooling Process**

*We sit in a circle on the blue carpet. This will be our last round of reinforcements and, as I look around the room, eyes glisten. The teacher players have already shared, and their reinforcements have been versions of what's been said on previous days: reinforcements of the players as a group, admiration for the talents of those in the room. We have spent the morning and early afternoon processing the institute through writing and discussion, stepping out of role*

*as players and reflecting on all that's happened as students and teachers, projecting how we might bring pieces of the program back to our respective classrooms. My right leg crossed in front of me, I feel my foot begin to tap. Maybe this is too much. We've been reinforcing all day. Maybe we just need to say goodbye. I will myself to continue smiling. Half the circle to go: all students. It's Static's turn. He sighs, looks up and blinks rapidly, then sighs again, a shuddering sigh. "I just, I love you guys," he says. Other players murmur in agreement, nod. We have heard this before. Static has entered the room declaring it, arms outstretched, every morning this week. And then he continues. "I've just never been in a place where there's no arguing, you know? Because at home, everyone's mad, everyone's arguing." The room is quiet. "I mean, we all love each other at home, but everyone's arguing. In school, too, everyone's arguing. Here, we just accepted what everyone said. You know, yes, and. Yes, yes. We didn't fight. So I thank you guys for that." Alex, sitting next to Static, throws her arms around him. I stare at Static, this boy whose resting expression is a grin so wide you can't help but smile back.*

Static references two separate concepts practiced over the course of the summer institute: *yes, and* and *yes, yes*. Our Day 2 teaching artist, an improvisation teacher, introduces *Yes, And*—the principle that when constructing a scene, an improviser must accept what his fellow improviser gives him (“Yes”) and then build on those ideas with ideas of his own (“And”). Facilitator Max inducts the players into the game *Yes, yes*, the game we play just prior to the performance. The players adopt both phrases as foundational concepts in the work of the summer institute, reminding one another that we must always accept and then build upon others’ ideas and that we must never say “no” to any idea—the response (as in Max’s game) must always be “yes.”

In an interview, Max discusses Static's comment:

Static said...that he hadn't been able to imagine a place where people weren't arguing. So that was a surprise to me, I think, for sure, and by extension of that idea and this isn't a surprise...but it's more like an affirmation of something for me that an academic community, which I would say we had through what we did for the past two and a half weeks was not a culture of argument. It was not a culture of argument, it was a culture of collaboration, it was a culture of contribution, it was a culture of gift-giving, it was a culture of kindness and generosity. (IN III)

In an academic culture of argument, ideas can be rejected. Students may not even offer an idea for fear that it will be dismissed or belittled. So they may not even give themselves the opportunity to interact with the shared text at hand. I begin to think, in the wake of Max's interview, about the relationship between the *culture* of the summer institute—this “culture of contribution,” “of gift-giving”—and our student players' understanding of Shelley's text. To what extent, if any, does this “culture” affect their reading? And what constitutes this culture?

In describing her efforts to emulate the summer institute in her own classroom, teacher player Mollie offers a window into these questions. Charged with designing a week-long workshop for entering sixth grade struggling readers and writers in the final week of August, Mollie draws from our summer institute work:

...there were no assignments, there was not a lot of right and wrong, there weren't spaces where there was the right answer or the wrong answer. You know, we read a story aloud and then we heard ideas about it. There were a lot of games, a lot of circling up...I think that that's what allowed everybody to feel safe...because it wasn't about finding the right and wrong answer, it was about what we're contributing to it. (IN I)

Mollie mentions that “there were a lot of games,” but her emphasis here is not on the fun that was had; it's on the absence of that dichotomous ‘right’ and ‘wrong.’ Mollie tells me about an email she received following her August workshop from the parents of one of the incoming sixth grade students, a boy she calls Chris. The parents thank Mollie and say that they have not seen Chris feeling this positive about school in years. Mollie laughs when she talks about Chris, says

that she “adores him, but he’s a pain in the butt...really adept at getting everybody off what they’re supposed to be doing” (IN I). Mollie goes on:

Kids, a lot of kids, school for them is like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole, and [Chris] is brilliant, right, a really, really bright kid, and there’s no reason that school should be the kind of place where he is sort of at odds, so I feel like this work just opened up a gateway to him that I don’t think would have been there. (IN I)

Chris, it seems, chafes at doing what he is “supposed to be doing” and, one might infer, giving the kinds of answers he is “supposed” to be giving. But when there are no assignments, when there is no right and wrong, he suddenly feels positive about school. When Chris enters Mollie’s classroom, he steps onto a playing field where he will be asked simply to contribute. There exist no criteria for those contributions and therefore no expectation that Chris’ contributions will take on some pre-determined form—just as it was in the summer institute. Mollie implies that it is this parsing of ‘right’ from ‘wrong’ that saps a classroom of safety. Teacher player Jessica underscores this point still further:

My kids, they’re very afraid to make a mistake. You know, sometimes, you’ll get classrooms that are completely silent and it’s not because they don’t know the answer. It’s because they don’t want to give the wrong answer....in school, you’re always trying to figure out yes, no is this the right answer? Is this the wrong answer? And sometimes I get so confused...and you figure why can’t we open that up and see what happens? And I think what happens is you stop being afraid. (TF I)

Embedded within Jessica’s comment, of course, is the assumption that there is—whether it be right or wrong—only one answer. But Mollie indicates that students “stop being afraid” not only in the absence of right and wrong, but when the classroom is no longer about singular “answers” but about multiple ideas. As teacher player Emily says:

Students want the teacher to have the right answer and there’s only one right answer and so my hope with this is that they’re realizing at a really young age that that’s not necessarily how it really works, that there’s lots of answers, there’s lots of different ways they can read and look at something. (TF I)

“It was about what we’re contributing to it,” Mollie says when describing her summer institute-inspired classroom, and this “we” proves significant; it is about what both the students *and* the teacher contribute. In *Response and Analysis: Teaching Literature in Junior and Senior High School*, Robert Probst (1988) writes, “If a class begins to work well, the students may accept the teacher as a participant in the same processes of responding and thinking, able to contribute as another learner” (p.54).

In her final reflection, student player Alex writes:

The question that I really wanted to answer was “What, in your opinion, is the greatest part about this program?” Personally, the fact that we had thirteen students and thirteen teachers all integrated into one collaborative company was very liberating. We, as the students, were introduced to the thought processes and minds of our mentors, which was a brilliantly informative experience. I also believe that having access to the minds of the students, teachers had the opportunity to be influenced by what we had to say. Teachers listened to the opinions and suggestions of the students and students revered and respected the voices of the educators. (WR)

The *invitations to create* assist Alex’s reading of *Frankenstein* prior to the summer institute; the sound and movement exercises change the way she re-reads the text during those two weeks. But it is the community of practice in which she engages those sound and movement exercises that seems to most profoundly affect her reading. When I ask teacher player Blythe what she carries away from the summer institute, she says:

There’s also the idea I think of collaborative community, that it’s not an independent endeavor and there’s a social learning that happens around the texts and you have to build the community, I think, to get to the point where that collaborative understanding, like opening up the text can happen. (IN I)

Those sound and movement exercises may open *Frankenstein* for Alex and Static and Bailey, but Blythe suggests that the exercises can only function in that way if embedded in a particular kind of classroom community: a community predicated on generosity. Teacher player Nora

writes in her final reflection: “I know that the first couple of weeks of school, I’ll focus entirely on community building so that authentic engagement with texts becomes possible” (WR). Nora implies that she has witnessed and experienced such authentic engagement in the summer institute. But what *is* “authentic engagement” with a text?

Perhaps it is the kind of engagement that happens in the classroom David Jardine, Patricia Clifford and Susan Friesen (2000) envision:

Rather than combating what has been offered up in argumentative ways in order to weaken it in favor of something else, one might rather attempt to strengthen it by taking it up, by taking seriously its claim on us, taking seriously its claim to be in some sense true of something. It should, that is, be taken up as a gift and read back perhaps more generously than the giver intended or knew or desired. (p.32)

*Yes, and. Yes, yes.* “Authentic engagement” with a text occurs not in a culture of argument, but in a classroom community that takes up and circulates the ideas of its members. In our final interview, Max reflects:

A major success...was the equal amount of feel-good on both sides of that transaction of the players and the audience, that it wasn't just like, we weren't just presenting *My Friend Frankenstein* and a bunch of sympathy moms came out. That didn't happen. People were moved by it, and it was a real performance. (IN III)

We had read *Frankenstein* “with an eye to its movement in our lives as a gift, as an arrival.” We had “releas[ed]...the gift-movement of contemporary usage back into its living inheritance.” And so the final performance, as Max says, was “real”; through the players’ production, Shelley’s *Frankenstein* continued to breathe. The text continued to move.

### **Revisiting the Research Question: II**

*How do teacher and student players describe what effect, if any, Performance at the Center has on their reading of Frankenstein?*

Teacher and student players describe the following in reflecting upon how *Performance at the Center* affects their reading of *Frankenstein*:

**1. Entry points into the text-** The summer institute offers players specific entry points into Shelley's text. By narrowing the area of focus, Invitations to Create render the text more manageable for student players; in a given invitation, players need only consider one moment or element in the novel rather than being asked to process the text as a whole.

Guest teaching artist workshops present sensory entry points into the text, giving players sensory "lenses" through which they might read and re-read.

**2. Embodied empathy-** As players examine individual characters, they begin to understand what motivates those characters they may have initially dismissed or condemned. Critically, this understanding comes only when student and teacher players literally step into character—when they begin to move physically as their given character.

**3. Recursive reading-** Rather than pulling them away from Shelley's text, multimodal activities push both student and teacher players to return continually to the novel. The players describe the way in which kinesthetic activities in particular give rise to surprising textual insights ("ideas [they] did not know [they] thought") that prompt re-readings.

**4. Multimodal layering-** Recursive reading facilitates a multimodal layering of meaning making for players—each mode explored reveals new textual meanings that do not supplant but augment the old. These new textual meanings emerge not only from the players' own personal multimodal explorations but from those they observe in others.

**5. Collaborative community-** Perhaps most powerful in affecting student players' understanding of *Frankenstein* is the collaborative community of the summer institute.

The goal of the final performance establishes a community of practice within which student players can apprentice themselves to teacher players in textual meaning making. The principles of *Yes, And* and *Yes, Yes*—surfacing in improvisational games and seized as community norms by happenstance—become foundational in cultivating an environment in which all players can offer their ideas to the group. Players can venture half formed ideas knowing that others will build upon them. The community values textual understandings not formed but *forming*. The players come to expect that their reading of *Frankenstein* will be ongoing and unending.



## Chapter VI

### THE AFTERMATH

*But again, this was a self-selected group. Well, self selected you know, groomed. People applied really wanted to be there. And then you got to pick from the people who really wanted to be there, right? So it was a very select group? Well, there's no application process for my class so I get what I get. (BLYTHE, IN I)*

#### **What Remains?**

For the vast majority of teachers, there exist no student applications for classes, no equal numbers of teachers and students, and no teaching artists leading workshops on a daily basis. There are no seven-hour days devoted to the study of a single piece of literature. All of this becomes unfeasible. So what happened for both the student and teacher players during this summer institute—their professed and perceived learning about Shelley's text—is not precisely replicable. We cannot look at this study and say that we want our students to have the same experience that those student players had in the company of the teacher players. We cannot ask what the implications of this study might be for students because, ultimately, this study is not really about those student players. As facilitator John says:

It's funny, the question of, 'who are we more invested in?' And I am more invested in the teachers in this one. The students are here, because, I think, it's going to be an amazing experience for them but as much as anything, they're here to help the teachers learn. This really, to me, is a teacher institute, that happens to have some really cool kids coming.  
(IN I)

We do precisely as John says: we immerse ourselves in the practice—the ten days (nine days, really, to create the performance) of the summer institute—and then we step back. We ask what it all means. We facilitators spend a full day reflecting with the players through discussion and writing, then three days talking with the teacher players alone. I spend half a year following up with four teacher players, asking in two separate interviews with each what this work has meant in their respective classrooms. I spend another six months attempting to make sense of what they have told me, what all of them have told me—my fellow facilitators, the student players, the teacher players. During the institute, after the institute. Even after days and weeks of listening and reading and annotating, however—this work still doesn't “make sense”; it raises questions. So what I offer in this final chapter is an articulation of those wonderings in the hope that we can begin to “make sense out of this work together.”

### **Transformations: Approaches to Teaching Literature**

In her 1966 essay “Against Interpretation,” Susan Sontag argues that “to interpret [a work of art] is to impoverish, to deplete the world—in order to set up a shadow world of ‘meanings’...it is to turn the world into this world.” Sontag notes that our drive to interpret art—and thus “to deplete the world”—arises from “the Greek theory of art as mimesis or representation”; if art imitates our reality, then to interpret is simply to recognize correlative parts. She posits that literature has been particularly vulnerable to this kind of corrosive interpretation:

The work of Kafka, for example, has been subjected to a mass ravishment by no less than three armies of interpreters. Those who read Kafka as a social allegory see case studies of the frustrations and insanity of modern bureaucracy and its ultimate issuance in the totalitarian state. Those who read Kafka as a psychoanalytic allegory see desperate revelations of Kafka's fear of his father, his castration anxieties, his sense of his own impotence, his thralldom to his dreams. Those who read Kafka as a religious allegory

explain that K. in *The Castle* is trying to gain access to heaven, that Joseph K. in *The Trial* is being judged by the inexorable and mysterious justice of God. . . .

Interpreters strive to see an element in a text as directly representative of some element in the world beyond:

Directed to art, interpretation means plucking a set of elements (the X, the Y, the Z, and so forth) from the whole work. The task of interpretation is virtually one of translation. The interpreter says, Look, don't you see that X is really - or, really means - A? That Y is really B? That Z is really C? (Sontag, 1966)

To interpret according to Sontag is to divide a work of art into component parts, to ignore the integrity of the whole. We interpret because that whole “has the capacity to make us nervous...by reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art...interpretation makes art manageable, conformable” (Sontag, 1966).

I would argue that interpretation does more than make art “manageable, conformable”; it treats art as a thing inert. So often that is exactly what we do in literature classes. We receive the text, the piece of art, as a corpse. We lay the corpse out on the table and coax students to poke and prod and dissect. We call this analysis. And when we have dismembered the corpse, when the parts lie strewn about and the whole perhaps unrecognizable, then we prompt our students to start stitching the pieces back together (we call this synthesis), all the while asking: *what does this really mean?* We juxtapose X in the text with Y in the text in the hope of understanding “that X is really-or, really means- A.” Throughout this process, the text remains dead.

At the summer institute, something different happened. Teacher player Nora writes:

At PatC [Performance at the Center], we've deepened our understanding of the shared text but, more importantly, we've created meaning. We've brought new ways of seeing to an old text. Maybe this is one of the most important things to bring back into the classroom. That reading is active and alive, and it's not enough to simply understand this point. Our pedagogies have to make it active and alive. (WR)

Of our “old text,” John says, “So, I think, it's funny, we stumbled into *Frankenstein* in some ways and now I couldn't see a more perfect book because it's playful, it's flashy, it's memorable, a little kooky” (IN I). I would also add that it's something of a metaphor. Dr. Frankenstein surveys the inanimate body upon his table, a patchwork of parts. “Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed?” he says (p.50). Performance at the Center, too, seeks the “secret” of life. “[The mission],” teacher player Blythe declares, “[is] to revitalize important texts through exploratory creative work” (IN II). As Sontag (1966) urges, “What is important now is to recover our senses...we must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more.” The creations that the players generate—both the individual remixes and their collective performance—help them to do just that. “We lived and breathed *Frankenstein*,” teacher player Liz says (IN I).

Yet a pedagogy of “active and alive” reading is not without its tensions, its intrinsic questions:

LIZ: What do we want kids to do later in their life? Do we want them to be able to tell us? Do we want them to be able to quote back text to us? Do we want them to be able to tell us what the green light in *Gatsby* means? No...So it's problematic depending on what you want your kids to walk away with. (LIZ, IN I)

With what *do* we want our kids to walk away? This becomes a question that lingers for teacher players and facilitators alike. Facilitator Max reflects:

I was so dissatisfied and I think anybody who thinks that those kids have a deep and profound understanding of the book *Frankenstein*, they've been misled. Not a wholly misled, but like, let's be real about that because I think they have a really good understanding of some aspects of *Frankenstein*...I'm so totally dissatisfied in that aspect of the work. (MAX, IN III)

But what does it mean to have a “deep and profound understanding” of *Frankenstein*? Who determines what constitutes depth and profundity? Teacher player Nora, the same teacher who declares that “we've brought new ways of seeing to an old text” continues on to say, “I think that

[the players] felt understanding and empathy for the characters though I felt like people didn't empathize with Victor in the way that I would have wanted them to, like if I was a teacher in a class" (IN I). Nora and Max both seem to want the players to read *Frankenstein* in a particular way. Nora tells me that there are certain indisputably revealing excerpts in any given text and that "part of the skill is being able to find those excerpts, like those excerpts when you're reading, oh, my God, and regardless of your orientation...the important excerpts are the important excerpts, does that make sense?" (IN II) Nora feels that it is her responsibility as a teacher to point students to those "important excerpts" when they cannot locate them alone. Teacher player Ruby appears to counter this sentiment:

I loved that activity with the hotspots figuring out what part of the book to discuss because sometimes I get in my teacher mode and you don't know what the cool parts are, and I do so let me show you! But what that activity really showed me and mining the journals too was no, the students when they take ownership of it, they're going to get the right parts, the parts that are most interesting and that's going to make the class so much better than if it's your own agenda when you're pushing every day but when you allow the kids, when you give the kids more credit, then the book and the students get a chance to speak. (TF I)

Nora and Max remain reluctant to relinquish their agenda; they feel a responsibility to remain in "teacher mode." They feel a responsibility to remain in control. And even as Ruby begins to cede power to the students, she does so only because she sees that "they're going to get the right parts." She still maintains, like Nora, that there are "right" parts and that "the important excerpts are the important excerpts." Ruby suggests that she, as a teacher, knows what those excerpts are. But do we, as teachers, always know? Should we?

I interview teacher player Mollie in the semester following the summer institute about her sixth grade class. She says: "I think that more than ever before I'm reminding kids of how much they are experts in many ways and how they're bringing just as much to the table as we are" (IN I). Mollie teaches at what she terms a "workshop model school," so her students primarily read

independent books. Both times I speak to Mollie, her class has yet to read a whole class text (though she professes plans to introduce S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* to the class in the spring), so her challenge is to create skill-based assignments that all of her students might be able to do regardless of the content with which they are working; Mollie decides that she will institute regular reading remixes. She lays the groundwork for the remixes by asking her students to complete notebook entries on their independent reading books, each notebook entry requiring writing on a singular idea (of the student's choosing) incorporating at least four quotations from the text. Mollie admits that she includes this requirement for quotations "because you want to get them in the habit of pulling out text evidence, right? My kids have to take this test" (IN II). But she notices that her students tend to hone in on one quotation, so Mollie wonders aloud whether it might be better to adjust her requirements to fit their emerging predilections (a decision she has yet to make). As they finish their respective texts, Mollie tells her students that they are going to take the themes of their story (as explored through those notebook entries) and remix them—through song, through video, through art. She models with a found poem, demonstrating how her students might juxtapose lines of "found" text from their stories and previous writing to reveal a major idea, and offers found poetry as another remix option. Mollie reflects:

And that was awesome, that was fantastic because I got a lot of found poems, and they were beautiful, and then I got a lot of weird, interesting stuff, like Garage Band songs, taking some lines from the story, the previews, the iMovie previews, what else did I get, I got some posters, like an ad, like an ad campaign. And that is when you feel like, oh, man, like now I'm doing something, now these kids are producing this work on their own, I'm not teaching into it except to teach what remix is, and the thing with that, the cool thing about that is teaching remix, you don't have to teach very much. The kids know it. (IN II)

Mollie seems to revel here in her role as facilitator (one who eases the building of her students) as opposed to instructor (one who builds). As Robert Probst (1988) tells us, "...by choosing to

view reading as an act of creation rather than a search for one true meaning, the teacher relinquishes the traditional authority of the pedagogue” (p.53). Mollie declares “now I’m doing something” when her students begin “producing this work on their own”; almost paradoxically, it is in the *not* doing that she is “doing something” as a teacher. Mollie says, “And again, you know I haven’t put a lot of rules on it, because I’m not sure what it is, so I kind of want to see what happens with it” (IN II). Mollie determines only that her students will make intellectual contributions to the class through remix; she does not predetermine what those contributions will be.

As Mollie describes the ambiguity intrinsic in her introduction of the remixes (“we don’t know, we don’t know what it is, let’s see what we need it to be”), she reflects, “So I’ve definitely noticed that there’s a lot more comfort around discomfort in my class, there’s a lot more comfort around I don’t know, we’re going to see” (IN II). Mollie says this in reference to her students, but I would argue that what pervades Mollie’s interviews—and perhaps what lingers most from the summer institute—is her own growing “comfort around discomfort” as a teacher. In the remixes, Mollie genuinely does not know what her students will produce. She furnishes the tools (in the case of remixes), but Mollie declares that “the primary goal or importance is where we’re allowing our thinking to take us” (IN II). In the months following the summer institute, Mollie sets up her classroom so that both she and her students are open to possibility, to moving in whatever direction the momentum of their ideas will carry them.

But, Max might ask, will that momentum carry Mollie’s students to “deep and profound” understandings of the text? How can we be sure that this creative work—the remixes in Mollie’s classroom, our work throughout the summer institute—is rigorous? Teacher player Liz shares:

I think that a way that I’ve tried to include rigor in creative assignments is you ask why did you do that, what inspired you to do that and we haven’t been asked why and that’s

been so nice. There's something about doing something, like creating a soundscape about Justine and having everybody go, yeah, totally, that was Justine. And there's no explanation of well, I hit the pot to signify Justine, you know, there was none of that. Thank God, right? That would be terrible. And then we would learn to pick apart what we did and just explain ourselves away. (TF I)

Susan Sontag argues against *interpretation*, the act of an audience encountering a work of art. Yet she might just as easily have been arguing against *explanation*. For in asking the artist *why did you do that?*, we reduce the work of art to its content in the very same way. If we conceive of those character soundscapes of Robert Walton and Justine as works of art (albeit in their nascent phases, being experiments rather than finished pieces), then we find that to ask Liz why she “hit the pot” in Justine’s soundscape, is, in effect, to ask is “Y...really B?” To ask for an explanation is to request an interpretation from the artist herself and therefore, Sontag might say, “to impoverish” the work of art in the process. Teachers do this again and again, ostensibly, as Liz notes, “to include rigor in creative assignments.” But how is this requirement for explanation (and interpretation) rigorous?

When I speak with Liz five months after the end of the summer institute, she has been shepherding her eleventh grade students through a performance project around Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Each group of students has chosen a central idea to explore in *Hamlet*—the role of women, madness, filial relationships—and crafted a performance piece to examine that idea, juxtaposing relevant lines from the play with movement. The final project will be a performance (Liz calls it “The Many Faces of Hamlet Festival”) for the school. Liz also requires that each student submit a two page artist statement explaining the connections between his/her performance choices and Shakespeare’s text:

But also I think we talked about it in the small teacher group that you led, you know I remember saying it’s kind of nice to make these creative choices and not be asked to explain why we’re making them. And there was a lot of trust in, yes, I believe in what



you're doing and I feel it and I see it. But there are the realities of being a teacher and having to grade and having to put standards to these things. (IN II)

Liz remarks that there exists a great deal of trust in allowing students—or in the case of the summer institute, players—“to make these creative choices and not be asked to explain why we're making them,” implying that the trust resides with the players; we trust that the players are making informed (rather than arbitrary) creative decisions. We trust that they are because we “believe in what [they're] doing and [we] feel it and...see it.” So a part of that trust resides in our sensory perception; we trust ourselves to *sense* what is happening in the piece presented. Yet that trust dissipates in the face of “the realities of being a teacher and having to grade”; suddenly, Liz suggests, teachers trust neither the students to make informed choices nor their own sensory perception.

Or perhaps the problem lies not in teachers' distrust of their sensory perception, but in the lack of space for that kind of perception in assessment and evaluation. Far more “manageable, conformable,” and *accessible* is the kind of interpretation Sontag so derides: the demand (through something like the artist statement) that the student articulate that “X is really—or really means—A.” Lynn MacGregor, Maggie Tate, and Ken Robinson (1977) observe that the “view of drama and the arts as peripheral to ‘the real business of schools’ is based on an interesting misconception...that feeling can be somehow disentangled from thinking and knowing: that these can be separated out from each other and taught in a kind of vacuum” (p.22). Yet we see through Liz's example that even when drama and the arts are made central in the classroom, even when feeling commingles with thinking and knowing in the teaching, there persists an impulse to separate out feeling from that thinking and knowing when it comes time to assess. *What do you now think? What do you now know?* the artist statement presses. The assignment does not ask what the student now feels.

I would argue, though, that the problem with the artist statement as a tool for the assessment of creative work does not stem from this omission of the *artist's* "feeling." "Feeling" may be silent in the artist statement but can still suffuse the thinking and knowing articulated. No, the problem in such assessment arises from the omission of the *audience's* feeling (and concomitant thinking and knowing). When the teacher, as audience, relies solely on the artist's understanding of the work, she denies her own. She invalidates her own transaction as a "reader" of the student artist's "text." Liz shares:

And I think about what the [Day 1 dance company] said, they came in and [the teaching artist] said you can do a vague gesture and then let the audience interpret what you did that was so vague and I think that's what we're doing for each other is that we're validating each other's work without an explanation or a reason. (TF I)

The artist statement does not allow the audience "to interpret what you did" in its demand for you "to tell me what it means." Nothing can be vague. And with that loss of ambiguity comes a certain loss of feeling. For sometimes an audience member's interpretation of "a vague gesture" may be not be a thought that can be put into words; it may be a sudden rush of fear or surprise or even happiness. But how is that possible when the creative work must be assessed? How might the audience's feeling, thinking and knowing factor into student artist assessment?

Going back to the character soundscapes for a moment, we find one way of reconceptualizing assessment:

AUTUMN: ...The assessment for that soundscape for Justine was other groups going, Oh, my God--that was Justine! Like that was it; nobody needed to create that assessment. It was a natural assessment. You wanted somebody to be like that was, you know, then people go, ohhh...like the simplest feedback you could possibly get. It does not take hours to grade, hello, but it meant more than getting an A on a paper. Because I'm going to forget that A but I'm going to build on, like, oh, I want to do that again. (TF I)

First and foremost, we see that other groups are the ones who assess. The institute may not be a traditional classroom with a single teacher, but there is a teaching artist in the room, and teacher

player Autumn does not mention her reaction to the work; the “assessment” comes from peers. Second, the assessment is simple—a single statement (“Oh, my god—that was Justine!”) encapsulating feeling, thinking and knowing. It is enough for Autumn to know that the soundscape has inspired recognition and reaction from other groups; she does not look to parse the precise feelings and thoughts. And finally, she terms this “a natural assessment.” I would suggest that this is “natural” because the assessment emerges from the objective or purpose of the assignment: the group’s goal was to create a soundscape capturing the spirit of Justine and, in so doing, to help the rest of the groups consider the character of Justine through composed sound. When the other groups name Justine, Autumn knows that her own group has accomplished its objective. Part of what we might glean from Autumn’s notion of a “natural assessment” is thus the importance of a defined purpose and audience in a given assignment. The assessment is “natural” when it is a determination of the extent to which the student(s) have realized the purpose of the assignment for their audience. But the assessment also becomes “natural” in contrast to “getting an A on a paper.” So what is so *unnatural* about that A?

A return to the principles of the gift economy may be helpful here. Customarily, a student writes a paper on a text and gives that paper to the teacher. In return, the teacher gives said student a grade. And yet though each may “give” something to the other, this is not a gift economy; this is a commodified exchange. As David Jardine, Patricia Clifford and Sharon Friesen (2000) note:

Much...classroom practice can be understood as operating within the border and boundaries of the language of commodity-trading, [and when commodified], education becomes full of a language of cross-border exchanges between teacher and student, between student and text, between consuming knowledge and reproducing it on tests, between the accumulating and hoarding of knowledge and the exchange of such knowledge for marks. (pp.29-30)

So students do not “give” their teacher a paper; students exchange a paper for a grade. No relationship has been established through the exchange, and there exists no debt on either side. By way of contrast, we look at Autumn’s soundscape. Autumn and her group members “give” their soundscape not to the teacher/teaching artist but to the rest of the players. This shift in and of itself, however, does not move the exchange out of a commodity culture, for Autumn’s group could expect to be “paid” by the other players (in some form) in return. And are they not paid with the players’ recognition of the character of Justine? Is this not the end of the exchange?

Far from the end, I would venture to say that the players’ recognition of Justine is a kind of beginning. According to Autumn, the players say, “Oh, my God—that was Justine!” There is excitement and surprise in that recognition, suggesting that the soundscape has catalyzed new thinking about the character and perhaps some new feeling. These new thoughts and feelings may, in turn, inspire further creative work from the other players (as indeed they did, as evidenced by a more lengthy, movement-based piece around Justine in the final performance), creative work that will be gifted, like the soundscape, to all in the room. And the chain will continue—with one creative piece giving rise to the next, to the next. A gift economy is in motion. Maybe what is “natural” about this assessment, then, is not the assessment itself but the classroom culture it implies: a culture in which students offer their work not to the teacher in exchange for a grade, but to their classmates in the hope of inspiring further work.

### **Transformations: Approaches to Teaching Teachers**

But teacher players like Liz must still return to their classrooms and face those “realities of being a teacher.” Much as they may attempt to nudge their classrooms towards a gift

economy, the teacher players must still teach within a commodity culture. In her final reflection, Autumn writes:

So I feel like both students and teachers will be caught up in the extreme tension programs like this would bring to schools immersed in traditional norms. I imagine conversations like:

“He demonstrated empathy for characters by clearly expressing inner conflict through movement and sound.”

“I’m sorry, what? What is his grade?”

“Well, at first he felt very uncomfortable making himself vulnerable, but by the end, he had become the character.”

“What does vulnerability have to do with it? Did he pass? Did he get an A? Is he going to college?” (WR)

Autumn’s imagined administrators and parents are not the only ones mired in the “language of cross-border exchanges”; the students, too, maintain a vested interest in the A. When Autumn says, in our teacher player focus group, that the soundscape response “meant more than getting an A on a paper,” teacher player Mollie is quick to reply: “But I loved getting As...that’s what’s so messed up is that I loved getting As” (TF I). Autumn reveals with resignation:

My students are completely motivated by grades, immediate gratification. They want to know they are right, right now. The idea of open-ended, no right answers, exploring, experimenting, often scares them. They get anxious. (WR)

Liz echoes this impatience in discussing her own students. In her final rehearsals for the *Hamlet* project, Liz brings in outside directors. She tells me:

I was talking to my guest directors today. You know they were saying like, they would throw out a suggestions and you know and they know and I know that theatre is all about experimenting, right? So my friend Luke would throw out a suggestion and the kids would be like oh, okay so you want us to do it like that, how can we do that. And he was like, no I’m just throwing it out there--what ideas do you have? And I think it reveals a lot about the system we’re working in, right? That kids are, kids are sort of trained to complete tasks not to experiment and fail, you know what I mean? They’re just like, okay, this is what we need to do, how can we do it in the quickest amount of time? How can we get it done and done right? (IN II)

Liz’s guest directors attempt to solicit student ideas, and those directors are summarily dismissed. Both Autumn and Liz’s students just want to be told what’s right; they want to be

told what to do. They don't want the onus of self-determination and choice and potential failure. And this need to distinguish definitively right from wrong, this need for clear expectations and measurable outcomes, Liz reminds us, is not necessarily the students' own; it endures as a product of the system within which they work. Considering the summer institute in writing, Autumn reflects:

This project had no grades, no official tests (certainly not paper ones), no right answers. Even halfway through the project we were not sure what the final performance was going to look like. I would say most people are super uncomfortable with ambiguity in life. It is really hard to not know what is coming next, to not have complete control over outcomes. American society/ so-called western culture is all about controlling variables to produce predictable outcomes. Work like we did in this program pushes the boundaries of "knowing" in that way. (WR)

Throughout their descriptions of the summer institute, facilitators and teacher players alike talk about their sense of the unknown. Facilitators don't know what to expect of teaching artists. Teacher players don't know what to expect of each day. No one knows how the final performance piece will coalesce. Autumn, above, calls this "ambiguity." Facilitator John calls it a sense of "unknowing." Yet I would argue that what they're really talking about is three kinds of "knowing"--the "un-knowing," the "not-knowing," and what I'll tentatively term the "re-knowing." Ruth Vinz, in her 1997 "Capturing a Moving Form: 'Becoming' as Teachers," advocates that teachers work continuously both to "un-know" and to "not-know":

I think of un-knowing, giving up present understandings (positions) of our teaching to make gaps and spaces through which to (re)member ourselves as we examine the principles behind our practices, as a way to articulate our theories in practice, or transform pedagogical principles and purposes into new becomings...to not-know is to acknowledge ambiguity and uncertainty--dis-positioning from the belief that teachers should know or be able to lead or construct unambiguous journeys toward knowledge about curriculum and practice. To not-know the classroom and the learning and teaching that will take place there is to admit vulnerability. (Vinz, 1997, p.139)

What so many participants (facilitators, players) acknowledge in their admission of the "unknown" is really the "not-knowing"—their acquiescence to ambiguity and uncertainty and

their willingness to be vulnerable. Towards the end of our first week together, teacher player Liz says:

For me, the way that this has been organized and scaffolded has allowed me to thoroughly enjoy every piece of it and I don't have to worry about burdening myself with the how, like how are we going to get there? That's on you guys, right? But do you know what I mean? I don't feel burdened, I just feel like there's a lot of time, there's a lot of room to breathe. (TF)

Liz recognizes that there is organization and scaffolding, but she doesn't trouble herself to figure out what that scaffolding is; she just experiences the summer institute. This was precisely our goal: we wanted the teachers to immerse themselves in the experience as players without the "burden" of thinking as teachers. John would periodically send out emails to the teachers in the evenings that first week asking them to reflect on what happened during the day, but I resisted these. "I think they should just be in it," I said, again and again. "We'll reflect afterwards." We did reflect afterwards, too, for those three days following the students' departure. John, Max, Allan and I shared all of our written plans and the teacher players annotated them with their thoughts and reactions. We entitled the processing of these annotations "The Man Behind the Curtain," alluding to Frank L. Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Like Baum's wizard, we facilitators had stood behind a metaphoric curtain throughout the summer institute, manufacturing the illusion that the final performance happened spontaneously. When we shared our written plans, we thought that we were pulling back the curtain, revealing our machinations. Maybe, though, this wasn't enough.

Nora is a first year teacher. When I ask her for some examples of how her belief in creative engagement has begun to manifest in her seventh and eighth grade classroom, Nora smiles sheepishly: "I think it's given me a better idea of what I want to do and not necessarily what I've done because I'm so just trying to figure it out" (IN I). Nora's seventh graders have just read Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street*, and she tells me that they are writing

vignettes inspired by the text. She wants her students to perform these vignettes, Nora says, because she thinks “of them performing their vignettes as a way of maybe understanding their writing better” (IN I). Nora discusses remix (as she describes it, “layering meaning”), too, as a way for students to potentially play with their writing. Of her plans to use remix in her classroom, Nora says: “Well, I think remix, I mean I’d like remix to fit in as a way of how do we create meaning, how do we play with meaning, and how do we like construct meaning based on the text that we read and study” (IN I). But when I see Nora a few months later, her seventh graders have not performed those vignettes, and remix has not become an ongoing element in her classroom.

In our second interview, we spend much of the time discussing possibilities for multimodal projects around Nora’s upcoming units—in the seventh grade, a unit grounded in *Twelve Angry Men*, in the eighth grade, a unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I try to maintain my position as an interviewer, to elicit the talking from her, but Nora pleads for advice and guidance. She wants to do a project similar to what she experienced in the summer institute, but says:

I think the question for me is how to scaffold. Because I can wrap my head around the final project, I just have trouble getting the students there. It’s really the scaffolding, the day to day. Even when I think I’m planning backwards, like what are the skills they need, what’s the content they need, something, there’s some gap between my ideas around that and then what actually goes into my lesson plans. (IN II)

I would contend that Nora “can wrap [her] head around the final project” because she has experienced it; she has been part of the kind of final project she wants to create. But she has been part of that project as a player. Reflecting on the summer institute, Nora says, “I think that kids had never read a novel so deeply as they did when we studied *Frankenstein* in the way that we had,” and as a teacher, it seems that she wants her students to read texts in the same way (IN I). But she struggles to transition from player to facilitator. Without fully understanding how to



structure work similar to what she experienced during the summer institute, Nora gets nervous; she reverts to what she knows. She points her students directly to those “important excerpts” in the text because she doesn’t know quite how to facilitate their discovery. Nora’s experience following the summer institute suggests to me that perhaps there was too much not-knowing for the teacher players.

“Not-knowing” requires both an “un-knowing”—a willingness to give up present understandings of teaching—and, I would also suggest, a sense of “re-knowing.” Through Nora, Max and Ruby in particular, I see evidence of both the desire and struggle to give up present understandings of teaching—to un-know. But that desire to un-know is born of a kind of “re-knowing,” an affirmation of a rooted belief in many of the core (albeit largely unarticulated) principles behind the work of the institute:

MAX: I think there was a real focus on learning and thinking and doing and playing...all that stuff was wildly successful and I don't think that that success happened because we were surprising ourselves that it was happening. I think that we believe in those things. (IN III)

The teachers who come to this institute—as facilitators, as players—come because they have an inkling that embodied creation out of text is valuable. They believe—on some level, at least—that “the reader [is] not [] submissive, bending to the author’s will, but [] creative, making meaning rather than finding it” (Probst, 1988, p.66). They sense the importance of not-knowing. They come because they want to test those suppositions:

NORA: I feel like part of what was really big for me was having the experience of creative engagement or understanding from my experience now that creative engagement is incredibly academic and rigorous. That’s what was transformative for me. Because I had felt that before but I didn’t have the experience to ground my, or to defend it. Because it is something that I think you need to defend and to argue and creative engagement as a means rather than as an end, as a way of getting kids up out of their seats or getting kids to go write a poem or something. But that it’s actually about teaching kids analysis. (IN I)

For Nora, the summer institute inspires a re-knowing, a solidifying and buttressing of beliefs long held but not fully understood. That re-knowing comes not from a reading or a lecture or even a discussion; it comes from “having the experience of creative engagement.” Nora re-knows her belief in creative engagement because she has engaged. Creative engagement has proven “incredibly academic and rigorous” *for her*. Facilitator John underscores this necessity for personal experience:

I think it's a power of engaging teachers in creative work together. I don't feel like you can't have a transformative experience, me personally, studying ideas. I feel like you have to do it, you have to experience it, it has to engage you as both an intellectual, but an artist, has to engage you as a creative...I've talked about the forced epiphany. I'm looking for people to have a radically altered sense of what's possible. (IN I)

Nora may have had a “transformative experience.” She may even have that “radically altered sense of what’s possible.” But much as she might have a sense of what’s possible, Nora indicates that she still doesn’t quite believe that it *is* possible, not in the system within which she teaches. She knows that creative engagement is something she will “have to defend,” something for which she will have to “argue.” She already anticipates opposition.

The prospect of returning to her school following the first summer institute “makes [teacher player Autumn] feel depressed, overwhelmed” too (WR). Autumn writes:

This experience was so transformative for me. As a reader I gained more endurance—yes, even as a teacher. As an educator I am inspired to let go even more and think about scaffolding in new ways. As a spiritual person I see the power of vulnerability and letting go...But what about those who are not so willing to let go—those who have learned to believe that authority figures have the right answers and the best one can do is manipulate them into giving you the best grade? How do we create a paradigm shift in regards to authority, control of knowledge, what it means to be successful and prepared for life? (WR)

Focused on the remix work with which we would be engaged in the context of the summer institute, I began this study thinking about the paradigm shift necessitated by multiliteracies and new literacies. Gina Cervetti, James Damico, and P. David Pearson (2006) characterize the

proliferation of “multiple literacies” and “new literacies” as a paradigm shift in *learning*. Autumn, however, gestures here towards a potential paradigm shift in *teaching*—in what we think it means to be a teacher, to teach well, to prepare students for “life”; this is the paradigm shift she leaves the summer institute mulling. She continues:

Everything about this program feels right. I believe if I had learned this way, I might have taken more chances, tried more new experiences. I remembering craving experiences like this, but there just weren't that many I was familiar with. I just wanted to learn and share.  
(WR)

Teacher player Mollie expresses a similar sense of re-membering:

[This summer institute was a] reminder of how important it is to be amongst a community of educators who put the same degree of importance on things like creative play that I do and gave a lot of it a certain legitimacy where I feel like often in public schools that stuff is scoffed at--you silly hippie kind of deal. And so I think it was a reminder of sort of what, it was a reminder to continue to re-evaluate what education is and what it means to do this job well, right? (IN I)

Mollie and Autumn, like Nora, has been somehow transformed by their experience of the summer institute. This opportunity to be learners has opened “gaps and spaces through which to (re)member [them]selves as [they] examine the principles behind [their] practices”; the space to learn has enabled these teacher players to re-examine what it means to teach.

### **The Potential for Explosion**

This past summer, in 2015, we repeated our experiment. Max left the facilitation team, but John, Allan and I remained. Emily, a teacher player from the inaugural institute, joined us as a facilitator. We tackled Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. And for the first week, the institute progressed as it had in 2014. Better even, we said as we congratulated ourselves at the end of

each day. It seemed as though players bonded more quickly; daily reinforcements were lengthy from the beginning. The players were *playing* that first week—experimenting with movement and audio remixes through teaching artist workshops, introducing inspiration for possible performance pieces through the afternoon remix share. Then the second Monday arrived, the day we were to put together the performance. We proceeded just as we had the previous summer, writing out the potential episodes we had created on scraps of paper and then attempting to collaboratively conceptualize some order, some shape to the final show.

But it didn't work the same way. The scraps of paper were scant. That first week, we hadn't created many full pieces that could be part of the performance. We had worked out half finished ideas, talked about possibilities. Most of the remix shares hadn't been remixes—they had been *ideas* for remixes (one of the student players had repeatedly shown videos of movement pieces composed through shadow, but we had yet to compose a movement piece through shadow). We were three days away from the performance, and we had titles for episodes (“Gregor’s Shadow Transformation”); we didn’t have episodes. Those all needed to be generated in three days. So the pressure mounted. Together, we worked every hour to realize those episode titles—Allan, Emily and I each in separate rooms with rotating groups of players, John circulating among us to offer input. *Keep creating on your own*, we told the players. We were desperate for more potential pieces. *How is the institute going?* a colleague asked when I ducked into my office at lunchtime that Tuesday. *Honestly?* I said. *I don't whether I can do this again.*

On Tuesday afternoon, in our final hour of the day, I sit in a classroom with half of the players, my heart beating in time with the second hand on my watch. Tick, tick, tick, tick. Our task: to come up with something, anything, for the last piece in the show, an episode we had

titled: *Who is Gregor Samsa today?* “We have a remix that may work,” one of the teacher players says, nodding to another teacher player. “It’s a video.”

“Great!” I say. The relief in the room is palpable. “Let’s see it.” We lower the lights, and we watch. Framed by the recurring question *Who is Gregor Samsa Today?*, the video splices an extended sequence of a white teenage boy smashing a cockroach against a glass floor (the camera on the opposite side of the glass to capture the event in all its gory detail) with still images and video of elderly adults, physically disabled children, gay couples and the Eric Garner arrest. The video ends, and one of the players flips on the lights. The room is silent.

“That was...powerful,” a student player offers, “thank you.” Other players agree.

“So do we want to build our final episode around this piece?” I ask.

“Can I just say something?” one of the teachers says. “I agree--this is really powerful. But it’s also really scary. And I don’t know...I just don’t feel comfortable having this as part of the show. I just don’t know that this is what the rest of the show is about.”

“Thank you so much for saying that,” one of the student players says, “I was thinking the same thing.” Around the room, both teacher and student players nod vigorously. “But it is powerful and really important.”

“So,” I say, “is there a way we could bring up the same issues without the video?” We talk about alternate possibilities: if the point is to illuminate the possible “cockroaches” of our society today, maybe we could intercut readings from newspaper articles? Maybe we could just focus on a few of the images? I look at my watch. It’s time to join the rest of the group in the performance space, and we have reached no decision. “Let’s think on this,” I say, perhaps a little too brightly. “We’ll make time to work on this section tomorrow.” Wednesday, the day before the show.

“Did you see the email?” John asks the next morning as soon as I enter his office. Allan, Emily and I all nod. “What are we going to do?” A teacher player has written an email to the whole group expressing both disappointment and rage upon learning that the video will not be included in the final performance. She was not the creator of the piece, but she saw the remix the previous afternoon. Another teacher player—one of the creators of the piece—has responded. This teacher ruminates on the way in which this decision has prompted her to question the purpose of art: is it not meant to provoke? Is it not meant, sometimes, to make the audience uncomfortable? John, Allan, Emily and I look at the schedule for the day. We decide to block off an hour, as soon as the players arrive, to discuss the remix as a whole group. “We’ll show the video to everyone,” John says, “And then we’ll talk. We’ll figure out together what to do.” We don’t have time to have this conversation, but we have to have this conversation.

We sit in a circle on the stage of our performance space. We’ve all seen the video and we’ve been talking. All of the student players who have spoken do not want to include the video. One says that her little sisters will be coming to the show, that she doesn’t want them to see it. The teacher player who initiated the email chain declares that we can’t avoid images like this. That these images are what Kafka’s text is really about. That we need to face the realities of the society in which we live. Players squirm as they adjust their cross legged positions on the floor. They avert their eyes. “I don’t think,” one teacher player offers tentatively, “that it’s about avoiding reality. It’s about our show. Tomorrow’s show. Maybe if we had seen this video last week, we would have had time to talk about it. Maybe we could have figured out how to incorporate it into more of the show. But right now, it stands alone and it’s jarring. We just don’t have time to figure it out.” I have remained silent throughout the conversation. I don’t know what to say.

We don't include the video in the show. We ask for volunteer players to help craft an ending to the show, and we decide to close with a full cast choral interrogation of the audience (a repeating crescendo of: *Who is Gregor Samsa? They treated him like an animal!*) followed by a spoken word poem performed by one of the video's two creators. The poem captures the spirit of the video and asks similar questions, but the images flashing on the screen above are gone. I watch our teacher player deliver her final line of the poem on Thursday evening and drop her head to signal the end of the show. I listen to the swell of applause. I should be thrilled or—at the very least—relieved. We did it: we created a show. But I just feel hollow.

The truth is that we—the facilitators—didn't want that video in the final performance. But it wasn't as simple as dismissing "The Mary Shelley Game Show." This wasn't something silly and trite; the piece was arresting and incendiary. Yet it also lacked nuance and subtlety. It needed to be discussed and dissected, dismantled and then reassembled. Every image needed to be questioned and the chronology of juxtapositions examined. But we had two days, and so it was dismissed. The teacher player who wrote the email of protest assumed that the piece was dismissed due to content. We facilitators would argue that it was dismissed due to form. Regardless, the video presented an opportunity to discuss both content and form: an opportunity to discuss the nature of art. And we glanced over that question because we didn't have time. We had to put together a performance.

We changed the title of our summer institute this past summer: it became *Literacy Unbound*. We wanted to underscore that the program was about exploring text across multiple modes and—in the process—beginning to "un-bind" traditional conceptions of literacy. We did explore Kafka's text across multiple modes that first week: we danced, we created audio mash ups, we wrote personal stories inspired by the novella. But that second week, performance was

still at the center. So we existed in constant conflict: here we were, back in the crucible of creation, attempting to produce a new “alloy.” Simultaneously, we were continuing to “un-bind” the text, the possibilities multiplying, the players beginning to separate rather than converge. And the heat continuing to rise. We moved forward into performance with the usual smiles and tears and applause. But when the students left and the teachers returned for our third week together (this year, a full week rather than a few days), the explosion finally happened.

It came after an offhand comment. We were selecting short stories around which the teachers would design curriculum inspired by *Literacy Unbound*, and a few of the teachers—all from Central and South America—suggested a text in Spanish. Someone then referred to them as “Team Latina.” They laughed. I didn’t think anything of it. But then the next day, a teacher player—that same teacher player who had instigated the conversation around the *Who is Gregor Samsa Today?* video—verbally, publically denounces the person who made the reference. She extends the attack to us all—every facilitator and teacher player in the room. She points to a pervasive, insidious racism suffusing the institute as a whole. She doesn’t show up to the institute the next day, but we have a group conversation in the wake of her outburst. Her feelings are not anomalous; others reveal latent resentment and anger around the way in which issues of race have been pushed aside over the course of the institute. *If I don’t know*, John had said during our first group conversation around the video, *teach me*. “Honestly?” one teacher player says during this second conversation. “I’m tired of teaching.”

The discussion centers on race perhaps because we are at a particular moment in history: Sandra Bland had been found dead in her cell earlier that week. Ta-Nehisi Coates has just released *Between the World and Me*. The teacher player who launched the attack returns to the institute the next day. After an hour of simmering silence, she lashes out again, this time with



direct insults. John asks that she leave. She does leave, but she also leaves a pall across our last three days together. She has cracked our group open and revealed the frustration festering within. We try gamely to bind ourselves back together through reinforcements each day, but we have unraveled. *We* are unbound.

I sit during our final lunch together and listen as John elicits advice from the teacher players: *what text might we use for the institute next year?* Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte—every author mentioned is white. *That’s because we have to use a text in the public domain*, John says later when I voice my concern. I think about the way in which teachers during our first institute characterized the work of *Performance at the Center*: the *revitalization* of literature. Yet this description implies that we address only those works that were once vital—that we “re-vive” the Western canon. If we—*Performance at the Center*, now *Literacy Unbound*—continue to select texts from the Western canon, then, we subtly suggest their primacy. We become complicit in their re-institutionalization.

But *Literacy Unbound* is not about a particular text, teacher player Liz tells me, it’s about an approach to text:

...just the whole idea of playing, complicating text by playing with it as opposed to complicating text by, I don’t know, whatever else we used to do, you know, asking kids to do close readings and pointing out specific lines and asking them questions, we’re just kind of playing with text. So I’ve been, I’ve had my kids do moving tableaux, we’ve been doing soundscapes...and I find that whenever we’re up and playing with text, we tend to have better discussions of what the text means. (IN I)

And could we not “play” with any text? I’m not sure. In the aftermath of this year’s Kafka summer institute, I think back to a time during my second year of drama school when we are all required to perform scenes from the August Wilson Pittsburgh Cycle. In a class of twelve, we have three students of color. “I’m not sure I feel comfortable stepping into these characters,” one

of my classmates, a Caucasian woman, says. “I mean, what right do I have to embody a character in an August Wilson play?” Did she have a right? As another Caucasian woman, did I? Do our students have a right to embody any character in any text? Do they have a right to imaginatively extend and alter any story?

“We have to do this all the time,” an African-American classmate replies, “How do you think I feel now, in a Noel Coward play? Or in a Shakespeare play?”

“But it’s Shakespeare,” another classmate says, “Isn’t he universal?” And once again, we circle back to our overriding assumption: that there are certain texts to which everyone can relate. And that these are the texts we should be revitalizing. These are the texts we should all be embodying.

I realize that I am perseverating, that I cannot seem to move beyond this issue of race as I think about the work of *Literacy Unbound*. *Not every conversation can be about race*, John reminds me, when I bring up these concerns. *I know, I think, but some of them will be*. Other conversations will be about religion, about sexuality, or about myriad other sensitive, potentially volatile issues. That is just what happens when we begin to “unbind literacy.” Maybe this is precisely *why* we want to unbind literacy in this way, to play with text: because then “we tend to have better discussions of what the text means.” So how can we prepare teachers for the possible concomitant explosions?

### **Future Experiments**

During the previous summer—the summer of *Frankenstein*—teacher player Ethan (an experienced thespian) had continuously, ominously intoned, “Things are going to get tense here,” as though he expected an explosion at any moment. That explosion never occurred. We

moved blithely on through our two and half weeks together without any kind of rupture. Facilitator Max admits in his final interview:

This work was successful and it kind of pushed people into that kind of discomfort and questioning and thoughtfulness...we built a routine called reinforcement that you had seen and so what happens when you get a bunch of people complimenting each other in a room? You get a community of kindness and thoughtfulness. When you shut down someone for being sarcastic and ironic and instead celebrate genuine curiosity and romantic idealism, do you get a room filled with people with starry eyes and willing to do anything? (IN III)

We brought about a gift culture, each gift—of a remix, of a compliment—weaving relationships among the players in the room. The players felt indebted to one another and eager to put still more gifts into circulation.

In our second summer, the summer of Kafka, I suddenly understood how fragile that gift economy—an economy predicated on relationships—could be. On the first morning that teacher player didn't return—the morning we ended up having our second conversation around issues of race—she sent an email to the whole group. She decried what she viewed as a dishonest positivity in the room, and pointed to our ritual of reinforcements as particularly coercive. Through her eyes, we began to see the reinforcements as false gifts—as forced gifts. We began to wonder whether the relationships we had forged were similarly phony. As we looked at one another, suspicious, the gift economy threatened to collapse.

Ultimately, we rallied. Teacher players and facilitators alike redoubled efforts to put genuine gifts in circulation—to reinforce others for their honesty when they expressed anger, for instance. On the final day, John offered each teacher player Mexican milagros. I watched as the teachers examined their miniature metal charms, studying the details, feeling the edges. One teacher player then presented a small, individually selected gift to every facilitator and fellow teacher player (a candy to one, a picture to another). The gift economy endured. But its

precarious survival raised questions for me: how might we foster—and not mandate—a culture of gift giving? How might we help institute players to recognize positive moments while still inviting the expression of frustration? How might we help our teacher players address the very same questions in their own classrooms?

I had wanted to finish this study of the *Frankenstein* institute prior to our second iteration with Kafka. In the months before our second institute, I thought of all the follow up studies I wanted to conduct: I wanted to follow up with those student players (Alex, Static, Bailey) and find out how, if at all, their experience in the summer institute continued to affect their reading. I wanted to go into the classrooms of teacher players and see for myself how, if at all, they incorporated elements of *Performance at the Center*. I wanted to remain in contact with both student and teacher players from that inaugural institute and conduct a longitudinal study to uncover how, if at all, the experience of *Performance at the Center* reverberated in their learning and teaching over the years. Because, as facilitator Allan says of the inaugural institute in his second interview:

It was an amazing, amazing institute and I just hope that we can have equally as to just going forward, 'cause it's like was that just sort of how do we capture this lightning in a bottle? Yeah, I mean, it's really a mystery of what happened there and why did it happen? (IN II)

I wanted to follow up with those who had experienced the “lightning,” to continue to probe the “mystery” of what had happened in July of 2014. I did not want the second institute to cloud my investigation of the first. Yet the months slipped by and the second institute happened. Suddenly, I was thinking about the selection of our shared text in a new way. I was thinking about the social and political implications of embodiment. I was questioning

reinforcements. I was wondering how much tension had been lurking, unexpressed, in our institute the previous year.

### **Revisiting the Research Question: III**

*How do select teacher players describe what effect, if any, Performance at the Center has had on their design and implementation of curriculum?*

In many ways, though, rather than *clouding*, the second institute *crystallized* my investigation of the first. No longer blinded by the “lightening” of the *Frankenstein* summer and now examining two distinct iterations side by side, I was at last able to diffuse some of the “mystery” and begin to distill principles endemic to *Performance at the Center*, now *Literacy Unbound*:

**1. Being a player-** At the core of *Literacy Unbound* rests the notion of being a player. In the summer institutes, this manifests in the eradication of the “teacher” and “student” titles; teacher and student players work side by side as equals. This, as I discovered in the first institute, enables students to apprentice themselves to teachers in their readings of the text. The role of player relieves teachers, in turn, of their need to evaluate or control the readings of the students, so teachers can experience what that loss of control might look like in a classroom. Teachers also get to live *Literacy Unbound* from the perspective of a student; they understand how the work influences their own reading of text and can therefore better appreciate and articulate how it might impact their own students.

**2. Building worlds-** Through invitations, John beckons players into the world of the text. The material ephemera sent with the journals both years help make tangible the world players are entering, and the journals themselves became a means through which players can immediately participate in that world-building. The teaching artist workshops then make the construction of that world three dimensional—movement enables players to step physically into the textual world, soundscapes work to carve a sensory landscape. The players’ engagement with digital remixing only serves to further develop the multidimensionality of the textual world (and to further press at its bounds). As teacher player Liz says of the first institute:

We want [our students] to be able to understand what it means to live in a book, to live in a new world. And I think that’s what we achieved this summer. We lived and breathed *Frankenstein*. So that book will stay with us, all of us, for the rest of our lives. Whereas I think if we just had a three week workshop where we sat around in a book club format and talked about the text, the impact would not be as powerful. (IN I)

*Literacy Unbound*, then, aims to help its players *experience* a text; players actively, visibly create Louise Rosenblatt’s “poem” in transaction with the text.

**3. Inviting multiple intelligences-** In the process of creating these “poems”, *Literacy Unbound* necessarily draws upon multiple intelligences. Rather than relying solely on linguistic intelligence, *Literacy Unbound* prompts players to interact with a given text visually-spatially, musically, bodily-kinesthetically, inter and intrapersonally. *Literacy Unbound* work not only values these other kinds of intelligence, but renders them integral to the study of text, suggesting that we can fully experience a text only when we move beyond a purely linguistic approach.

**4. Gifting-** *Literacy Unbound* work grows out of a gift economy; it relies on the generosity of its players—players’ patience with and compassion for one another and their willingness to donate their own intrinsic gifts to the group. The work functions well only when time and care are devoted to the cultivation of relationships among participants. Perhaps this necessity for a gift economy grows out of *Literacy Unbound’s* approach to text itself: text is viewed as a gift received, and a gift meant to be passed on.

**5. Performance-** Clearly, in our decision to rechristen the institute *Literacy Unbound*, we suggest a move away from performance. Yet there exists an element in performance that seems crucial and, indeed, central to *Literacy Unbound*. When I ask student players to comment on the relationship between our process and product, Sophie says:

I think it’s working towards the performance. Because I think, I was talking with my partner, a teacher, and the fact that we had one superobjective made it easier for us to bring in so many ideas and to make this piece be as amazing as it was. So when you have a goal like make a piece or make a performance, I think it really opens the way for so many ideas and things to come. (SF II)

With the prospect of performance comes investment; the players create because they have a reason to create. They apply to the summer institute because they want to be part of a final performance. The performance drives our two weeks together, providing energy and momentum. So performance *is* at the center of our summer institutes.

In the classroom, *Literacy Unbound* work does not necessarily need to culminate in a performance. Teacher player Mollie, in fact, admits that when she describes her summer fellowship to others, her “quick response is like oh, it’s about teaching literature

through performance but that's just because I need a sentence" (IN I). When I press her on this point, Mollie elaborates:

So I think that the performance part has to do with there being an audience. That's sort of my immediate response. However I do think that the performance part also has to do with the synthesis. Synthesizing whatever the ideas are that are coming out of the book and then doing your own thing with it. So the ideas of a performance and a remix are in many ways quite related and the same so while I will stop it at an audience, I understand that for some people it might need to be the actual, physical performing of it. (IN I)

Mollie distinguishes between "performance" as a synthesis of thinking offered to an audience and "performance" as "the actual, physical performing of it," an act associated with the stage. The latter, Mollie suggests, does not present itself as integral to the work she experienced in the summer institute while the former does: Mollie believes that students need moments in which they must synthesize their thinking for external audiences. The performance allows the text to move outward.

**6. Risk-taking-** Perhaps most critical—but also most difficult to articulate—is the place of risk-taking in the work of *Literacy Unbound*. Of course, there exist the more obvious risks taken among the players—the risk to share a remix, the risk to participate in a given activity. In our second focus group, student player Bailey tells me:

My mom said after yesterday's performance, she was like...when we were all dancing and in the front line, and she said she almost wanted to laugh out loud when she saw that because she was like what did you do with my daughter? She's like, oh my gosh, you were dancing. And she's never seen me do that, and she was like I wouldn't have thought you were able to do that. (SF II)

Bailey must take a personal risk to participate in the performance.



But then there are also the risks for the facilitators. John had designed large projects before but never a performance project like this one. Allan had worked on performance projects but never one of this scale. Max had never had any experience with performance. I had directed many performance projects but never one in collaboration with three other facilitators. None of us knew what to expect. As Allan muses on the ultimate success of the first institute, he asks:

How much of it was that we were figuring things out at the time? How much of it was that sense of vulnerability that we portrayed to [the players], that if we had this down, it might make them more secure. Like they said, "Oh, yeah, these people know and they're secure in what they're doing." But it also might make it seem like there's a method to this vs. oh, let's figure this out and see what happens, which I think is really key to what happened at this institute. (IN II)

This kind of risk-taking—the risk on the part of the facilitator, the teacher—becomes the most fundamental to the work of *Literacy Unbound*. When teachers engage in this work in their classrooms, they, in role as facilitators, must take a risk: they must be willing to cede control of outcomes. What questions will students ask? What insights will students offer? What pieces will students create? What issues and tensions will arise? Teachers cannot know in advance, just as we did not know in advance. They must be willing to experiment.

I realize that I and my fellow facilitators, too, must be willing to continue experimenting if the work of *Performance at the Center*, now *Literacy Unbound*, is to progress. We can—and must—adhere to those underlying principles of the work. But we cannot shy away from the questions the work engenders. We must continue this research—to find out how facilitators can better open spaces for text-inspired creation and how that text-inspired creation continues, if at

all, to influence players' reading of a text. We must ask, not avoid, those questions around world-building and embodiment—around whether we *can* ask students to build and step into any textual world or whether there are some worlds that should remain on the page. *Can* we “un-bind” any text? *Should* we? I don't know.

What I do know is that I recently had a conversation with one of the teacher players from our inaugural institute—this fall, 2015, over a year later. She wasn't one of the teachers I had interviewed, so I hadn't spoken with her since the institute ended. She had recently become a graduate student and was in my office. We were talking about a school assignment. And then, suddenly, she said, *you know*, Performance at the Center, *it just changed everything*. I looked up from my computer screen, startled. *What do you mean?* I said. She told me about the way she had started to see her students as partners in the classroom, the way she asked students to get on their feet and embody text at every opportunity, the way she had invited students to co-create out of text through remix. *It wasn't like our institute*, she said laughing, *it was messy*. *But I just wanted you to know*, she said, *my classroom came alive*.

*Yes*, I thought—*because your students began to look at one another*. And because this work of *Performance at the Center*, of *Literacy Unbound*, “messy” though it may be: *these* are the things we should be doing in school.

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Appendix A

**Interview Protocol: FACILITATORS**

**INTERVIEW #1**

Name:

Pseudonym:

Interview #:

Interview Date:

Interview Time:

Interview Location:

**1. Background**

1.1 What interested you in *Performance at the Center*? How did you first get involved?

1.2 What kinds of work have you done similar to the work of *Performance at the Center* before?

1.3 How would you define your role in *Performance at the Center*?

**2. Planning**

2.1 Can you describe how you started planning this summer's Institute?

2.2 How did you decide what to include? What to exclude?

2.3 Can you describe what has happened prior to the first day of this Institute with participants?

2.4 What will happen the first day of the Institute? Why did you decide to do this on the first day?

### **3. Teaching Artists**

3.1 How do you see the role of the teaching artists in relation to your role as instructor?

3.2 How were these particular teaching artists selected? In general, what do you look for in a teaching artist?

3.3 Can you describe how you decided upon the sequence in which they would work with the participants?

### **4. Projections**

4.1 What excites you as this Institute approaches?

4.2 What challenges do you anticipate as this Institute approaches?

## **Interview Protocol: FACILITATORS**

### **INTERVIEW #2**

Name:

Pseudonym:

Interview #:

Interview Date:

Interview Time:

Interview Location:

#### **1. Planning**

2.1 Can you describe a particular day of the Institute that went well from your perspective as an instructor?

2.2 Can you describe a particular moment over the course of the Institute when you had to deviate from your original plans?

#### **2. Teaching Artists**

2.1 What do you think instructors need to consider when they hire teaching artists for this work?

2.2 What changes would you have made, if any, to the sequence of the teaching artists?

2.3 What did you find most surprising about your work with teaching artists?

2.4 What did you find most challenging about your work with teaching artists?

#### **3. Projections**

3.1 If you were to be involved in the planning of *Performance at the Center* again, what would you keep the same? What would you change?

3.2 If someone who wanted to start a similar program asked you for advice, what would you say?

#### **4. Reflections**

4.1 What did you find most exciting about your work in planning this Institute?

4.2 What did you find most challenging about your work in planning this Institute?

## Focus Group Protocol: STUDENT PLAYERS

### FOCUS GROUP #1

Name:

Pseudonym:

Focus Group #:

Focus Group Date:

Focus Group Time:

Focus Group Location:

#### 1. Background

1.1 What interested you in *Performance at the Center*? How did you first decide to get involved?

1.2 What kinds of work have you done similar to the work of *Performance at the Center* before?

1.3 How would you define your role in *Performance at the Center*?

#### 2. Reading

2.1 In general, what, if anything, do you enjoy about reading literature?

2.2 In general, what, if anything, do you find challenging about reading literature?

2.3 Can you describe your reading of *Frankenstein* prior to this Institute? What, if anything, did you do as you read?

2.4 What interests you about *Frankenstein*?

2.5 What do you find troubling or confusing about *Frankenstein*?

2.6 What more do you want to know about *Frankenstein*?

### **3. Institute Experiences**

3.1 Can you describe a moment in the Institute so far that has affected your thinking about *Frankenstein* in some way?

### **4. Projections**

4.1 What excites you as this Institute begins?

4.2 What challenges do you anticipate as this Institute begins?

**Focus Group Protocol: STUDENT PLAYERS**  
**FOCUS GROUP #2**

Name:

Pseudonym:

Focus Group #:

Focus Group Date:

Focus Group Time:

Focus Group Location:

**1. Reading**

1.1 Can you describe a moment in the Institute that has affected your thinking about *Frankenstein* in some way?

1.2 Can you describe how and when you returned to the text of *Frankenstein* during the course of the Institute?

1.3 Of all the teaching artist workshops, which one made you most eager to return to the text of *Frankenstein*? Why?

1.4 Of all the teaching artist workshops, which one helped you to learn something new about *Frankenstein*?

1.5 On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely are you to read *Frankenstein* again?

**2. Performance\***

2.1 How would you describe your performance in relation to the original text of *Frankenstein*? Is it *Frankenstein*? Is it inspired by *Frankenstein*?



2.2 What was your goal for your audience (what did you want them to do, feel or understand?)

### **3. Reflections**

2.1 If someone asked you what you learned about reading at this Institute, what would you say?

2.2 What from this Institute, if anything, might you bring in to your classrooms this fall?

2.3 What from this Institute, if anything, might you think about when reading a new piece of literature yourself?

**Focus Group Protocol: TEACHER PLAYERS  
FOCUS GROUP**

Name:

Pseudonym:

Focus Group #:

Focus Group Date:

Focus Group Time:

Focus Group Location:

**1. Background**

1.1 What interested you in *Performance at the Center*? How did you first decide to get involved?

1.2 What kinds of work have you done similar to the work of *Performance at the Center* before?

1.3 How would you define your role in *Performance at the Center*?

**2. Reading**

2.1 In general, what do your students find challenging about reading literature?

2.2 In general, what, if anything, do you find challenging about reading literature?

2.3 Can you describe your reading of *Frankenstein* prior to this Institute? What, if anything, did you do as you read?

2.4 What interests you about *Frankenstein*?

2.5 What do you find troubling or confusing about *Frankenstein*?

2.6 What more do you want to know about *Frankenstein*?

### **3. Institute Experiences**

3.1 Can you describe a moment in the Institute so far that has affected your thinking about *Frankenstein* in some way?

### **4. Projections**

4.1 What excites you as this Institute begins?

4.2 What challenges do you anticipate as this Institute begins?

**Interview Protocol: TEACHER PLAYERS  
INTERVIEW #1**

Name:

Pseudonym:

Interview #:

Interview Date:

Interview Time:

Interview Location:

**1. Background**

1.1 What excited you most about your work with *Performance at the Center*?

1.2 What kinds of work have you done similar to the work of *Performance at the Center* before?

1.3 What did you find most challenging about your work with *Performance at the Center*?

**2. Planning**

2.1 Can you describe your curriculum plans?

2.2 How, if at all, did you draw from your experience with *Performance at the Center* in creating your curriculum?

2.3 Can you describe your process in creating these plans?

**3. Projections**

3.1 What excites you as you think about implementing this curriculum?

3.2 What challenges do you anticipate as you think about implementing this curriculum?

**Interview Protocol: TEACHER PLAYERS**  
**INTERVIEW #2\***

Name:

Pseudonym:

Interview #:

Interview Date:

Interview Time:

Interview Location:

**1. Planning**

1.1 Can you describe a particular day of your curriculum that went well from your perspective as an instructor?

1.2 Can you describe a particular moment over the course of your curriculum when you had to deviate from your original plans?

**2. Institute**

2.1 In what ways, if at all, did you draw from your experience in *Performance at the Center* in your implementation of this curriculum?

2.2 What did you find most surprising about your implementation of this curriculum?

2.4 What did you find most challenging about your implementation of this curriculum?

**3. Reflections**

3.1 If someone were to ask you what “pedagogical principles” you took away from *Performance at the Center*, if any, what would you say?

3.2 If a teacher wanted to attend next summer's *Performance at the Center Summer Institute*, what advice would you give?

\*Other questions will be added after I analyze the first set of interviews.

### **Script for Study Introduction (for facilitators)**

I am looking for volunteers for my doctoral dissertation research study on the Performance at the Center Summer Institute and the way in which instructors scaffold the co-creation of a text-inspired multimodal performance piece. The purpose of this research is to inform curriculum development and my work with graduate students and colleagues in English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. If you volunteer, you will be asked to participate in two 30-60 minute interviews about your experiences in planning for the *Performance at the Center Summer Institute* and your views about text-inspired multimodal performance co-creation. These interviews will be recorded on a voice recorder. I will ask you to create a pseudonym for yourself to protect your identity. Notes from meetings, daily plans, and handouts for Institute participants will also be reviewed and analyzed to trace the scaffolding of the multimodal performance piece. I will keep the voice recorder, transcripts of the recordings, and all documents in a locked filing cabinet and on my personal computer (protected with a personal password). Data will be coded to prevent identification. After the dissertation defense, all recordings will be destroyed. The individual interviews will be conducted by me only, Adele Bruni, at an agreed upon location.

### **Script for Study Introduction (for Student and Teacher Fellow Focus Groups):**

I am looking for volunteers for my doctoral dissertation research study on the Performance at the Center Summer Institute. The purpose of this research is to inform curriculum development and my work with graduate students and colleagues in English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. If you volunteer, you will be asked to participate in two 45 minute focus groups about your experiences in the *Performance at the*



*Center* Summer Institute and your views on reading a literary text in this way. These focus groups will be recorded on a voice recorder. I will ask you to create a pseudonym for yourself to protect your identity. I cannot ensure full confidentiality during focus groups, as you'll be sharing your viewpoints with other individuals. Therefore, you may opt out of this activity at any time. I will keep the voice recorder and transcripts of the recordings in a locked filing cabinet and on my personal computer (protected with a personal password). Data will be coded to prevent identification. After the dissertation defense, all recordings will be destroyed. The focus group sessions will be conducted by me only, Adele Bruni, at Teachers College, Columbia University.

**Script for Study Introduction (for Teacher Fellow Interviews):**

You are invited to participate in a research study for my dissertation on the *Performance at the Center* Summer Institute. The purpose of this research is to inform curriculum development and my work with graduate students and colleagues in English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. If you volunteer, you will be asked to participate in two 30-60 minute interviews about your experiences in curriculum planning and implementation following the *Performance at the Center* Summer Institute. These interviews will be recorded on a voice recorder. I will ask you to create a pseudonym for yourself to protect your identity. I will also ask to analyze any curriculum documents you are willing to share. I will keep the voice recorder, transcripts of the recordings, and curriculum documents in a locked filing cabinet and on my personal computer (protected with a personal password). Data will be coded to prevent identification. After the dissertation defense, all recordings will be destroyed. The interviews will be conducted by me only, Adele Bruni, at an agreed upon location.

## Appendix B

### Select *Invitations to Create, Frankenstein, Summer 2014*

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INVITATION TO CREATE, June 21st

Dear Players,

We have the opportunity to read several of Robert Walton’s letters to his sister, Margaret Saville, yet we do not see any of her missives in return.

Imagine that *you* are Margaret. Perhaps you have received one of Robert’s letters, perhaps all, perhaps none.

Write to your brother...what did you think of his journey when he set off? What do you think now? What specifically do you want him to remember about his childhood, his home, his family? Imagine your surroundings—you, Margaret, as you feel the weight of the pen in your hand, the candle lighting your lonely composition.

Walk a bit in Margaret's shoes, as the saying goes, imagine what this character thinks and feels. Then compose your letter. Consider enclosing an image or two.

*See you in 18 days.*

Warm regards,  
The Performance at the Center Team

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INVITATION TO CREATE, June 23rd

Dear Players,

“Her presence had seemed a blessing to them, but it would be unfair to her to keep her in poverty and want, when Providence afforded her such powerful protection. They consulted their village priest, and the result was that Elizabeth Lavenza became the inmate of my parents’ house—my more than sister—the beautiful and adored companion of all my occupations and my pleasures” (Chapter I).

How might Elizabeth tell the story of her life in Italy and subsequent journey to the Frankenstein home? How might she detail her early days with Victor? Imagine you are Elizabeth, and share your account—of a week, a day, an hour—in whatever mode(s) of expression you see fit.

*See you in 16 days.*

Warm regards,  
The Performance at the Center Team

INVITATION TO CREATE, June 25th

Dear Players,

“I am already far north of London, and as I walk in the streets of Petersburg, I feel a cold northern breeze play upon my cheeks, which braces my nerves and fills me with delight. Do you understand this feeling? This breeze, which has travelled from the regions towards which I am advancing, gives me a foretaste of those icy climes. Inspired by this wind of promise, my daydreams become more fervent and vivid. I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight...” (Letter 1)

In *Frankenstein*, we move swiftly from one landscape to another--from the “icy climes” of the pole to the poor Italian cottages clustered around the Lake of Como to the university laboratory at Ingolstadt (to name just a few). Select a landscape from the novel upon which to focus and consider what this region presents to *your* imagination...you might start with what you see, but then move beyond to consider the visceral experience of being in that particular place...what “play[s] upon [your] cheeks”? Upon your ears? Your fingertips? Fill one or two pages of your notebook with your evocation of this place--images, collections of words, textures, music (in whatever forms you think apt)...

*See you in 14 days.*

Warm regards,  
The Performance at the Center Team

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INVITATION TO CREATE, June 26th

Dear Players,

Shelley weaves references to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s 1798 “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (<http://poetry.eserver.org/ancient-mariner.html>) throughout *Frankenstein*. Read through Coleridge’s poem and then select a phrase, a line, or a stanza that ignites your imagination in some way. Record these words in your notebook and riff...you might juxtapose them with words from Shelley’s novel, pieces of your ephemera, drawings, materials culled from your own research...the choice is yours.

*See you in 13 days.*

Warm regards,  
The Performance at the Center Team

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INVITATION TO CREATE, June 27th

Dear Players,

“I’ve begun to realize that you can listen to silence and learn from it. It has a quality and a dimension all its own.” — Chaim Potok, *The Chosen*

*Frankenstein* is bursting with so many words, so much verbalization of thought and feeling, that it becomes easy to overlook those characters who remain largely silent. Are they silent by choice? By compulsion? We invite you to choose one character and “listen to [a moment of his/her] silence.” Explore its “quality and dimension”—from where does this silence come? Why and when does it persist? You might express your findings in text, images, shapes...

*See you in 12 days.*

Warm regards,  
The Performance at the Center Team

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INVITATION TO CREATE, June 29th

Dear Players,

In describing the courtship of his parents, Victor says, “He came like a protecting spirit to the poor girl, who committed herself to his care; and after the interment of his friend he conducted her to Geneva, and placed her under the protection of a relation. Two years after this event Caroline became his wife” (Chapter I)

What happened during those intervening two years between Alphonse and Caroline? At a recent sale of properties from the Frankenstein estate, you have come upon some remnants from that time squirreled away in the box below. Use one or two pages of your notebook to share pieces of what you have discovered—artifacts, fragments of writing (letters, journal entries, lists), pictures...



Found within the box...

*See you in 10 days.*

Warm regards,  
The Performance at the Center Team

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INVITATION TO CREATE, June 30th

Dear Players,

“Madame Moritz, her mother, was a widow with four children, of whom Justine was the third. This girl had always been the favourite of her father; but, through a strange perversity, her mother could not endure her, and after the death of M. Moritz, treated her very ill...” (Chapter VI)

Unbeknownst to Elizabeth Lavenza (who relates Justine’s story to Victor), Madame Moritz has left a letter to Justine—to be opened up the former’s death—explaining the source of her unkindness. You have found this letter (opened and discarded? still sealed? in part? in whole?) and have decided to place it within your notebook with your own commentary in the margins...

*See you in 9 days.*

Warm regards,  
The Performance at the Center Team

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