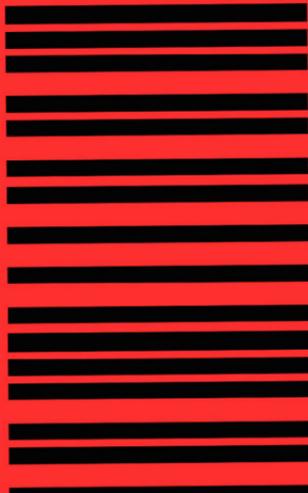
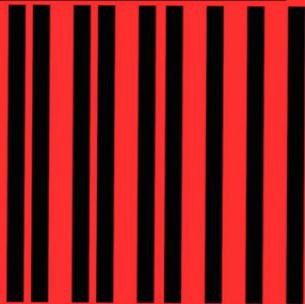


An Experiment
in
5 Acts



THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE

PRESENTS

AN EXPERIMENT
IN 5 ACTS

DIRECTED BY
AIN GORDON

CASTING
AIN GORDON
WITH
THE PEW CENTER FOR
ARTS & HERITAGE

CREATIVE DOCUMENTATION
JAY KIRK

THIS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP
WAS CONCEIVED BY AIN GORDON
IN COLLABORATION WITH THE STAFF OF
THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE,
PHILADELPHIA

WELCOME

The primary work of The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage is that of a multidisciplinary grantmaker. Each year, in an effort to foster the vitality of the cultural sector in the Philadelphia region, we award up to \$10M to organizations and individuals, in the form of project grants, individual artist's fellowships, and organizational advancement grants. Integrally related to this primary agenda, however, is a complementary and highly focused program of capacity building, including a strong commitment to knowledge-sharing around issues that are critical to cultural practice and production.

Self-criticality—or, perhaps better said, productive self-assessment and re-examination—is a subject that has been central to our knowledge-sharing work. We are interested in how creative communities can foster environments that value constructive, historically inflected, and reflective discourses, that, in their turn, can strengthen, refresh, and revitalize practice.

An Experiment in 5 Acts (5 Acts) is one of several efforts the Center has made to engage this issue. Conceived of in collaboration with Obie Award-winning playwright and former Center Visiting Artist Ain Gordon, the goal in this case was specific: to explore ways that we might be more appropriately responsive to the capacity-building needs of mid-career practitioners—those who are established in their careers, have reaped rewards for their work, and yet are nonetheless facing the different challenges that attend their ambitions and goals for this phase of their life's work. The result was a complex, multifaceted experience for both the producers and the 'actors.'

We promised confidentiality to the participants, to encourage the most candid dialogue possible. Sharing the sharable part of the project with you, as we endeavor to do here, required a form of creative documentation that would protect our promise but allow us in some way to archive an extraordinary intellectual venture. We hope you find this peek 'behind the curtain' to be of interest.

Paula Marincola
Executive Director, The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage

ACTS & SCENES

ACT I

Scene I: Scribe Video Center, morning
Scene II: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, afternoon
Guest: Choreographer Ann Carlson
Date Performed: January 16, 2014

ACT II

Scene I: Institute of Contemporary Art, morning
Scene II: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, afternoon
Guest: Artist Christopher Robbins (Ghana Think Tank)
Date Performed: March 27, 2014

ACT III

Scene I: Headlong Dance Theatre, morning
Scene II: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, afternoon
Guest: Playwright and novelist Mac Wellman
Date Performed: June 26, 2014

ACT IV

Scene I: Temple Contemporary, morning
Scene II: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, afternoon
Guest: Artist Pepón Osorio
Date Performed: October 29, 2014

ACT V

Scene I: Slought Foundation
Guest: Performance Curator Mark Beasley
Date Performed: April 10, 2015

CAST

Archeology and Ethnology Curator
Choreographer/Dancer #1
Choreographer/Dancer #2
Composer
Contemporary Art Curator
Documentary Filmmaker
Interdisciplinary Storyteller
Music Producer
Theater Director

Guests MARK BEASLEY
ANN CARLSON
PEPÓN OSORIO
CHRISTOPHER ROBBINS
MAC WELLMAN

Thinking Partners MEGAN E. CARTER
LYNNE COOKE
KRISTY EDMUNDS
KENNETH GOLDSMITH
VIJAY IYER
MARY JANE JACOB
DANIEL ALEXANDER JONES
MARC BAMUTHI JOSEPH
DAVID LEVINE
KEN LUM
EIKO OTAKE
JAMES PHELAN
BARTLETT SHER
MAC WELLMAN

Videotaping, audio recording, and photographing of this production were strictly prohibited.

FROM THE STAGE MANAGER

I was a stage manager without a stage. They were actors without an audience. Over the course of fifteen months, nine highly accomplished cultural practitioners from the Philadelphia area met in private to collectively address their artistic challenges and aspirations at mid-career.

One asked, “After years of doing commissions for others, how can I find my own voice?” Another, “Should I seek a larger public platform and more resources, or should I retreat into the more intellectually remunerative space of my own research?”

Ain Gordon, our director and dramaturge, let the actors write the script. Well, ok, not literally: Gordon conceived of *5 Acts* as a series of largely self-directed exercises that were meant to set in motion already extant narratives in each participant’s practice, as well as the writing of a new one for the group as a whole. For example, to achieve the former, he had all the participants select a “thinking partner” outside the group with whom they met in one-on-one sessions between meetings. For these, Gordon imposed no agendas. He also invited “guests” to the meetings whom the participants could interrogate however they saw fit.

I doubt we’ll know for a long while if this experiment succeeded or not. In the moment, it felt raw, formative, and consequential.

Peter Nesbett
Associate Director for Programs
The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage



A CONVERSATION WITH AIN GORDON

The Center: What were your original hopes for An Experiment in 5 Acts (5 Acts)?

Ain Gordon: I had two overarching questions I wanted to explore. The first was, “What could professional development look like for an artist who is firmly in a career track, and who has been recognized and rewarded?” Because once you’re on a track, once you’ve established a pattern of work, it’s very hard to step away from it. Even the act of stepping away can become fodder for the pattern. My second question related to the issue of isolation. I think if you age into an actual career—if you’re lucky enough to—you age into a certain kind of isolation. You see the people you need to see to do your work and they have expectations of how you will behave and vice versa. So, you might end up making decisions more or less within a closed system. So the question was, “Is it possible to put practitioners together with others who, like them, are smart, creative problem-solvers but who come from other disciplines, and

who might shake up each other's approach?"

What opportunities like this exist for mid-career artists right now?

Along these lines, I don't think that there are many. There are residency programs where you have dinner conversations together before you retreat to your bungalow and suffer at the empty page or empty canvas. But when you become a mid-career artist it becomes harder and harder to say, "Yes, I'll go somewhere for two weeks for no money and leave my kids and my partner and whatever else." I don't know of many programs that are low-residency like *5 Acts* was.

How did you manage the Center's expectations while simultaneously pursuing your own agenda?

I was fortunate, having spent the previous two years as the Center's inaugural Visiting Artist. I didn't have to manage expectations too much. I was given a long, long, long leash and a lot of trust and a very little amount of checking in.

What outcomes were you looking for?

I wasn't. I'm not sure at this point in a practitioner's career what the outcome would be—this was an investment in examining process rather than outcome. Let's be clear that these people are my peers. My expectation was that by bringing people together around a set of mid-career quandaries, we all would begin to recognize the overlap in our questions and the differences in ways we were each approaching them, making assumptions about them, not noticing that we hadn't addressed them, et cetera.

There were no tangible deliverables either.

Right. Well, that was also partially because I didn't want the conversations to orbit around a specific project, with pressures on completion, because I think that if you are well along in your career and you know you are heading towards the completion of a project, you are at some point going to need to dismantle the open

ended-ness of the question you are pursuing and just answer it simply because of external deadlines. I wanted the group to remain focused on the questions. This meant sitting in the discomfort of not knowing, which is something that many of us don't regularly do at this stage of our professional lives. And in remaining with the questions, we were all teaching each other.

Did you sense that discomfort in the room during 5 Acts?

There were some who were attracted to the openness like bees to honey and there were some who found it quite difficult. How people responded was case by case and changed over time.

One reason 5 Acts is hard to generalize about is that the participants were all in the room together, but they were all coming at the experience with very different perspectives, career histories, work habits, and expectations of themselves.

Absolutely. And different practices, each of which mandates different kinds of alone time or different kinds of open-ended time. At 30- or 40-something it's just not that often that you sit around with a bunch of people and say, "So what do you do when you go into the studio in the morning? How does that work for you?" Some people are interested in, "Wait. So you just sit there or you just X, or you just Y? I never do that."

We had an open-forum check-in at the beginning of every one of the five all-day acts. They were at times excruciating and a little therapy-like, which we all joked about, but over time, this broke down the tendency of participants to perform their professional personas for each other.

What kind of artist or practitioner is going to get the most out of a process like this? Thinking back to the selection of the group, if you were to do it again, might you have approached it differently?

I think the group was well-chosen. There were people that surprised me, absolutely, who came to it more fully than I expected or resisted it longer than I had expected, which is fine. More important than what type of person participates is the balance of casting in the room. There needs to be two people whom

you know will be into it, so that they can show the rest of the cast that somebody *can* be into this. There can then be people who are confused. This will shift over time. Some people whom I thought were not going to be the devotees became the devotees.

One of the things that I didn't do well is that the program was better designed for an artist practitioner than a curator practitioner, and yet we had artists and curators in the room.

Talk a little bit about that.

I think the open-ended-ness of the questions themselves were more attuned to what I know, which is being the generator of the material as opposed to a selector, an organizer around the material. And although I believe that curating is an artistic practice, it still might be called an interpretive artistic practice as opposed to a generating practice. I think I didn't have enough information about what the questions inside that practice might be, or the form they might take, or what it feels like to be that person for 20 years. I had more sort of gut-level knowledge of the other experience. I'm not sure how I would address that if we were to do it again. The curators were of value to the artists because the way they talked about their dilemmas was totally new and fresh to them. And likewise, I think the curators hearing from artists about their questions also had value. I'm just not sure that I designed the overall arc in a way that was right for them.

Are there questions that somebody might ask themselves before going into a process like this to really gauge their own readiness or willingness?

I'm not sure. I think the intake interviews were vital. None of it for me was about the questions the individuals were asking themselves—everybody's question is valid, and who am I to have a decision about their question? It was more about how willing they were to be in conversation.

For that reason the intake sessions were deliberately informal, over coffee. I asked them, "What things are you thinking about and what things would you be interested in thinking about?" And that just for me was, let's see who is willing to have this conversation and let's see who already has the tools to take care of it themselves

and there's nothing I can offer. There was one participant who did end up being in it who I said, "This person really doesn't need this. This person can really take care of it on his or her own." And then, to my surprise that person became one of the strongest players and a real kind of cheerleader. So I was wrong. Or I was right but the program still turned out to be of value to this person, so I was wrong. Now that I've done it once, it would be easier for me to be a little bit more provocative in the intake interviews and say, "It's going to be like this. Is that going to be okay for you?"

Beyond a willingness to converse with others, what else were you looking for in the intake interviews? What kinds of questions were you hoping people were asking?

Yes. The more tangible they were, the more they were outside the parameters I had set. It wasn't about people trying to figure out how to hire an assistant. To that I would say, "You need an assistant? You should get an assistant." What I wanted was the mush—bigger, larger, roaming questions that probably are not about getting answered; they are literally just about articulating the questions clear enough that it hangs around for you, and you can pull it out and look at it.

Give us an example of "mush".

I don't want to give away too much of people's personal material, but one of the participants had the questions, "Who is my audience, really? Who is it? Who do I wish it would be? Who do I think it is? Who do I assume it is?" This person was asking this not because he or she was going to suddenly do a different kind of outreach or suddenly go for a different public venue. This person was asking a more essential question of, "Who am I doing this in front of, and what do I know about them?" That, to me, had enough mush about it.

There was also at least one case in which the artist or curator articulated one line of questioning during the intake interviews but it turned out that the es-

sential question they wanted to ask themselves was actually something else.

There were several people like that. The director in me would sometimes sit there and say, “I think this person’s question is really this. So, I’m going to see if I can get them to reconsider the form of their question and perhaps I will or will not be right.” Perhaps they will not be right; perhaps it is somewhere between where we both think. But there were definitely people who moved the form of their question.

Let’s talk about the thinking partners. The participants identified thinking partners with whom they met between sessions. Was this a way of extending the impact of the program so it was less episodic? Less start/stop/start? How did that work out?

Those who were able to deploy that resource earlier in the process in a way that worked for them may have been able to step off a bit more. There were people who—it tended to be the same people who were ranking against the open form—couldn’t deploy that in a way that worked for them because they kept looking for it to be a road to a destination, which it wasn’t. I was perhaps foolishly thinking that what we were achieving in the room could immediately be transferred to these thinking partner conversations. But I think it was too much in the outer world, so outer world behavior determined those conversations more than I had foolishly thought.

Meaning what?

Meaning: “Where is it going to go?” “What is it going to be?” “What do you want from me?” These kind of destination-oriented conversations that were not actually helpful because, in fact, there weren’t any parameters. Where were they going to go? It was more about trying to have a *My Dinner with Andre* experience. You were going to have *My Dinner with Andre* in your own way, which you are going to self-direct. Maybe the conversations with the thinking partners should have started later, after we had had some meetings. Maybe I should have been in one of them. Maybe they should have happened in pairs. I’m not sure.

That's a good point. Because even after the first two sessions people were still trying to get used to the purposeful lack of destination. And so when they are meeting with their thinking partners, they are dragging that with them because they haven't yet de-programmed in that way.

That's interesting because during the first two sessions they were saying they wanted to do this or do that. And I kept saying, "Great. Set it up. Let me know." But actually, I thought it was a good sign that they backed away from setting it up themselves. They kind of left it in the chaos. And I was like, "Okay. Good. Keep going with the chaos then."

What about the special guests? What was their role?

There were a couple of reasons for having a guest at each day-long session. One, I thought that since we had these individual thinking partners, wouldn't it be great if there was also a communal thinking partner. And if people saw how each other heard or reacted to or picked up on elements in the guests' presentations that could be useful. "Really? Your question is about that? Those questions didn't occur to me. My questions are about this." Or, "I just think everything that person said is nonsense but you don't. I don't know why." These group discussions with the guests, in the afternoons, were more tangible and in contrast to the morning discussions which were so personal and required a willingness by all to be vulnerable.

So that was part of it. Also, because I also didn't know how the one-on-ones with the thinking partners were going, I thought this was a way for me to gain insight into people's thought processes and concerns, so that I could eventually start to design who the guest was in relation to things I thought were not, or were, happening in the one-on-ones that needed to happen more or less. So it was a little bit of theatrics.

Is a funder the most effective steward or instigator of this type of project? Where should a project like this ultimately live?

I think it is perfectly reasonable for a funder to be the steward of it. This funder, embedded in a geographic domain that it supports in all different ways, might be better positioned and more effective than a national funder. The Center has deep interpersonal relationships with the practitioners in this city. So I think that's perfectly reasonable. It was noted by the participants the ways in which the Center kept its hands off the process. In some cases, this expanded their view of the organization, which was certainly one of my agendas as well.

But I also think it could be academically sponsored—
I think a number of different kinds of organizations could sponsor it.

Because it is quite different. I mean, right? It is breaking and reformulating the relationship—

Right. Which I think that can only be good.

5 Acts was part of our capacity building work for our constituents. Generally, we design these experiences not only to increase the competitiveness of our constituents but also to stimulate the next round of applications, you know, one cycle later. We're constantly asking ourselves, "Did that workshop work? Are we funding better projects as a result?" We're always hoping for long-term organizational impacts but we're also often looking for these short-term impacts as well. This is a program that is not geared to short-term impacts. Which simply meant that we had to come to terms with and develop a degree of comfort around the fact, as you have said, that we may not know the impacts for some years.

It's a long-term investment. I think that struggle of figuring that out was the same struggle the participants went through. How do they see worth in this arc? How do they know that they are doing what they want to be doing? How do they know they are getting what they should get out of it? Those are the questions we often don't have time to ask anymore at this point in our careers. So even the questions about the process are the beginning of asking the questions the process was there to support, which are bigger questions about your working methods, your desires, your wish for

outcome.

This process is not going to tell you, for example, who you are actually performing for. But it is perhaps going to get you to ask, “Why am I asking that?”, which is actually the question.

Can you imagine designing a template that artists could use as a point of departure for their own, self-tailored 5 Acts program?

I don't know. Certainly I think anybody in that room would know how to, could run such an event, that they are well-equipped for it by their own practice. Ironically, however, given the open form, I think it helps if there is a facilitator who is, you know, willing to live in the discomfort and willing to live with some discomfort coming back at them. Someone used to *directing*, a person who is willing to have extensive sidebar exchanges with the participants—because I did lots of sidebar exchanges. So, a facilitator who has both a strong design sense and a strong tolerance for not appearing to have a design.

Was your discomfort in the facilitator's role limited largely to the open-ended process and not knowing how people were going to take to it and how it was going to work out? Were there other things that fed it?

No. That was mostly it. And, you know, I think sometimes people found me a little inscrutable, which they found tedious.

In terms of your own intentionality?

Yeah. There were days when I came away and thought, “This didn't go very well.” I could solve it but if I solve it then we're not doing anything. That would be me just making the day more fun or more shaped, which isn't what I'm here to do or what they are here to do or what we said we're going to do. So the sort of tolerance for temporary failing—I had to have a lot of tolerance for that.

Is there anything else you wanted to mention that we haven't touched on?

A bunch of people said, “Oh, you know, I hope it goes on,” and that raised for me the question of why would people want more of it? Is that a good thing or a bad thing? I think it is just a testament to the truth of the fact that having an actual career is relatively lonely after a certain point. Even if you don’t think you crave this kind of behavior, you do crave it if it’s for real. What you don’t necessarily crave is sort of the performed, public version of it—meaning the panel in front of an audience or the public talk—which actually is just the same as what you do all the rest of your time. That’s work as opposed to personal research.

Looking back what do you think was the most successful about 5 Acts?

In some ways it’s not our privilege to know if the program worked or not. It was an investment that will play out over time among serious career-long practitioners. We know that at the end of it, the majority of the participants spoke quite strongly—the majority, not everyone—about having had an experience that mattered for them. My first indicator of that, though, which I loved and which was exactly what I would have hoped, was people who didn’t know each other started to have sidebar conversations and send each other emails. They started inviting each other to their openings and showings. And that said to me that a culture of different kinds of exchange had been set up.

We remember in the final session one of the participants talked to the group about how the experience put him back in a state of mind that he hadn’t felt since he finished school—where he didn’t know everything, where everything is fresh.

Right. It is kind of boring to talk about, but the “treadmill” is real. And by the time you get to a certain stage in your career you are on the treadmill for better or for worse, often both. There’s a lot of discussion about stepping off the treadmill to replenish, but it’s actually pretty hard to do. You have worked very hard to be on the treadmill, to achieve the treadmill. You have worked very hard to develop a toolkit that will harness the treadmill for its best aspects and allow you to still make what you make, despite the treadmill’s parameters. And you are rewarded for being that person. It takes

more than one three-hour conversation at a foundation to get off the treadmill. It takes a willingness by a sponsoring body like the Center and a group of intrepid practitioners to endure an evolving process—an “experiment” (it’s not an accident that we called it that). We had to jointly risk not just that experiment, but a purposeful turning away from our natural desire for outcome toward creating an arena for examining the very processes by which we *arrive* at outcome. It’s a more elemental examination.



A REPORT ON THE PROCEEDINGS

By Jay Kirk

ACT I

Wherein the Writer meets the Artists and attempts to comprehend the purpose and shape of the Experiment wherein the Artists themselves attempt to comprehend the purpose and shape of the Experiment.

We were in a clean white room, gathered around a clean white rectangular table, on the 18th floor. There was coffee, and bagels, and the blueberries were fresh and delicious. When entering or exiting the building the Artists were warned to steer clear of elevator #3. It was at one point of egress from the building, on elevator #4, in search of a cigarette, that it occurred to the Writer how he had been commissioned to report on an experiment freed of the conventional laboratory strictures of, say, a control group, and this made him, the Writer, wonder what would happen if the experiment were regulated by a more fascist set of conditions and rules, such as, perhaps, that the participants restricted themselves to the question: What is the role of ego in my work?

It was, as they say, just a thought.

As a group, we are all at various stages of our work, including the Writer, who has come in the persona of the outsider/insider, who will distill what he absorbs, and hopefully serve as some regurgitative utility to the Artists. As chaotic as our experiment may be, we are all mature practitioners who have arrived at a certain degree of accomplishment. Our focus and struggles are formidable. We have come together in this room, 18 floors above the city of Philadelphia, to grapple and reflect over critical questions of practice—and we find ourselves vulnerable in our own midst. But perhaps this is only because we are more daring than most? Our theater director, for instance, has arrived at such a prima facie counterintuitive position that he is now putting on "straight" performances of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night: an approach so willfully forthright as to be

radically subversive. The art curator struggles whether or not to put herself "in front" of her exhibitions, a question of ego that resounds for many others in the room. One of us is engaged in work that involves "making stuff" and then moving that stuff around on stage while performing variable texts. The museum archeologist, who is looking to make the experience of mummies more interactive for her public, discusses the possibility of a mummy "mobile," which the writer pictures—thinking Calder, rather than food truck—as a kind of mummified piñata.

One of us recently created a sculpture resembling a space age Buddha; the viewer sits inside the Buddha's belly and listens to ambient sounds exterior to the artwork via a system of hacked baby monitors.

A number feel that the cultural impact of our work is of primary importance; some of us prioritize the role of contemplation; some are at the stage where we would prefer to be ignited. We share a desire for "stronger narratives" and "new narratives" and the "narrative of human experience," though there is little consensus on what this thing called "experience" denotes, nor are we entirely in agreement as to what "narrative" itself means. Perhaps it has to do with storytelling, perhaps juxtaposition, or the process of choice, unless when our juxtapositions are given entirely over to chance, and thus have less to do with choice, except, of course, the choice to leave it all up to chance. Narrative, as we know, requires the rigorous application of structure. No story, performance, exhibition, experiment, is possible without it, and yet narrative is something that only comes slowly, and grows out of chaos, so that is where we naturally begin today.

At a number of points during the gathering our impresario-slash-organizer, an award-winning playwright, expressed a wish to abdicate control of the direction the experiment will ultimately take to the other Artists. He was testing our boundaries, our capacity for open-endedness. If the Artists did not care for his original, proposed direction of "structured chaos," then, no hard feelings; he suggested they propose their own structure for the next time we convene, for Act II.

One artist, in a vulnerable moment, said she sometimes wondered if her time might be better spent planting trees. A few confessed to an "unabashed spirituality." There was a near unanimous abhorrence of dramaturgy. We spoke of archival anxiety—that is, the phobia of archives. We discussed the grandiosity of the artist, the sustainability of collaboration, making the world "as it is," the illusion of ownership, activation of the space, the commissioned vs. the uncommissioned piece vs. the transcendent piece, the role of "time signature," even if, at times, the tempo of Act I approached larghissimo.

We spoke of the distraction of funding, the role of the institution. We spoke of the moment of practice. One of us was brave enough to comment on the compelling negative spaces left behind after the Taliban dynamiting of the Buddhas of Bamiyan. We spoke of the freedom of "not capitalism." At one point the Artists were handed out petty cash to take cabs across the city to board a night train through the Bozeman Pass, where images of Eadweard Muybridge's buffaloes were projected against a dark and stuttery landscape.

“Do people feel electrified by this experiment yet?” said the impresario-slash-organizer.

“I like words,” somebody said.

“No TEDTalk bulls**t,” said one performance artist.

Then, before we all gathered around YouTube to watch a quartet of attorneys perform a choreographed dance with their shoes glued to the floor, a few murmured in unison: “Context. Context. Context.”

That’s when the esteemed performance artist we had invited as a guest advised real-world experience. For instance, she said, we might consider attending auctioneering school, as she had done. Then, seemingly disappointed by the lack of response to her idea, she sang an Allen Ginsberg poem to us.

Lay down yr camera Lay down yr image right/
Lay down your image Lay down light/Lay down
your ignorance Roll yr wheel once more/Lay
down yr suffering Lay down yr Lion’s Roar!

One of the Artists proposed designing the next session, Act II, on the model of philosophical speed dating. The theater director volunteered to conduct acting workshops for the rest of us, though in general it was accepted that next time it might be more ideal to atomize into smaller groups and meet at a café, or a tapas bar, or perhaps an undesignated neutral space. When the Writer wondered aloud how he might document the day’s proceedings it was suggested he make a collage or perhaps present it as a graphic novel or a video game. Some were in favor of retaining the structured chaos of Act I, where oth-

ers favored something resembling "order," though the latter minority seemed embarrassed to suggest anything so blatantly teleological.

We are, today, reluctant narratologists.

But we have yet to arrive at Act II. We must first shed the ego, perhaps, work out our inchoate fragments, thorns, and noise that invariably accompany the first day of serious creation.

On the TV screen in the cab, on the way back from the Bozeman Pass, was an actor sitting at an important looking desk, wearing an important looking suit (an attorney?), but he was doing something strange with his feet, which were naked. He was at his desk, his legs up in the air, playing an elaborate game of footsie with himself, and this went on for some duration, a drawn-out choreographed routine. Because the volume of the cab's TV was muted, the meaning was not clear, but somehow this uncertainty was quite enjoyable.

Abandon Your Practice.



ACT II

MISGUIDED MACHINES

This is the First Rule of Ghana ThinkTank.

The ThinkTank founder, Chris Robbins, is our Act II guest today.

Chris came to this position after taking a closer look at the unintended consequences of his own do-gooding in West Africa. He questioned the unexamined impulse of the "first world" to impose its good intentions on the developing world. For instance, an anecdote: A Peace Corps volunteer notices there's a lot of smoke in a hut and decides that what this place needs is a chimney. She sets about the work of building chimneys, but a few years down the road there's a massive spike in malaria. Another example: An NGO visits a village, sees an open well, warns the villagers about the danger of goats falling in the well, and then benevolently arranges to have it sealed and replaced with a costly pump. Five years later when the pump breaks, the NGO is long gone, so the entire village must get up and move to a new water source. So Chris decided to flip the process. He began to collect first-world problems instead, asking people to share their gripes at New York galleries. Then he outsourced think tanks in Iran, El Salvador, a VFW in Queens, the Think Tank of Incarcerated Girls, etc., to come up with solutions, to provide answers, i.e., creative directives.

First World Problem: How do we treat our elderly with more compassion?

A: Listen to old people tell their dirty stories.

No matter the directive, they had to execute the command. This became more intensive once Chris took it on the road to

places like Sremska Mitrovica, Palestine, and the U.S.-Mexico border. Hire hot Albanians to be lifeguards. Have tea with Hezbollah. Start a "Deport me to Canada" campaign. Set off bombs in your dreams, though, with luck, in real life, the directives will never come to that. It is jarring and exhilarating for us—the Chorus of Act II—to think about substituting our own intentions. It is just as liberating to hear our guest say, without seeming the least hung up about it, that whether it is "ART" or not is completely irrelevant.

Especially in light (in lighght) of this morning's dialogue around the overly hung-up manifesto "How to be Dumb" by Kenny Goldsmith—thinking partner, laureate poetaster, creative plagiarist, man of intentionally mismatched socks—a manifesto which got us onto the hierarchies of intuition, intellect, status-mongering, and other questions of egoistic cosmology, and which lent us the useful language—dumb-dumb, smart-dumb, smart-smart—for discussing how we might balance our multiplex roles as organizers, editors, creators, and makers, all divergent but essential parts to our identities as artists, the dumb-smart intuitive parts working in tandem (not versus) our more managerial-admin smart-smart parts.

Dumb-dumb. Smart-smart. We tend to dismiss such categories.

NASCAR is dumb-dumb? NPR is smart-smart? Gertrude Stein is smart-dumb? This porridge is just right? These pigeonholes seem facile and over limiting. We feel there can sometimes be a danger of "knowing" what you're doing. Whereas if you're spending too much time fretting over your status or your classifications—manifesto writing being manifestly the

work of the hung-up smart-smart—when do you get to the smart-dumb work of discovery? At what point while transcribing weather reports—the allegedly smart-dumb work of Goldsmith—does one shout Eureka? We all abandon our practice (in the best sense) and we abandon our best intentions each time we actually get down to the dumb-smart instinctual thing, making things, creating, working just out of reach of intention. But, even if you're like the bona fide smart-smartest among us, our museum exhibit director, whose job it is to shape and organize the objets and ideas of her learned colleagues, and to balance those multitudinous smart-smart voices with the demands of the academic institution, and all those immaculate intentions, all ultimately intended to impose edification on the public—whose own intention, for better or worse, is only to have an experience—even if you are that smart-smart, you still acknowledge the essential F-U-N of letting all those parts messily collide.

Otherwise isn't it just another tired exercise in reduction?

Otherwise, won't you just get trapped by the static of your own intentions?

To illustrate his own erstwhile folly, our guest, Chris, shows us the dead fish machine. It is an essay of sorts. The fish machine is a diagram, a schema. The fish hangs from a branch, fatally looped to a misguided but perfectly calibrated automaton. The machine shows the process of his thinking. A windshield wiper motor, a system of moving gears and dowels. A coping saw slowly cutting the branch. When the fish drops in the pail, we understand. This is all designed to fail at its own intended

purpose. "A concentric or inward pointing system," Chris says; this is what the fish machine is meant to demonstrate. There is only one outcome. Chris built it to better comprehend, to point out the flaw of following his own wrongly intuited command sequences, to liberate himself from his own practice, to out-manuever the obstacle of his own overly determined intentions.

Whereas for the manifesto writer, one suspects he would see the dead fish machine as a good day's work. A predetermined success. When one sets out to transcribe the telephone book, the machine is the concept is the intention. Of course, for some of us, it's enough to stay inside our dead fish machines. It's enough to remain happily oblivious to the stench of trout. But for today's chorus, both strophe and antistrophe (we take turns), we wonder: Shouldn't art, by definition, have more than one outcome? How much of our own flawed process do we want to show? How can we learn by first deconstructing those processes and exhibiting them via constructed diagrammatic machines? What would our own dead fish symbolize? How about the pail? Coping saw? How do we get outside the process of our own thinking? How do we escape, let alone abandon, our own practice? Do we still have a practice once we've deciphered our own process? What if our machine generates nothing but questions? Most people outsource transcribing: Can we outsource ambition? How about a new aesthetic? How can we better protect our audience from our own inclination to impose our best, however misguided, intentions? Or do we just let the machine continue to execute its commands ad infinitum? Transcribe. Cut and paste. Execute objective. Drop fish in pail. Plunk. If, then, again. Execute objective, execute objective. Perhaps, at this point, would it not be better

to outsource our work to a think tank of swineherds in the Hindu Kush? Is that question culturally insensitive? What if our machines generate nothing but questions? Most people outsource transcribing: Can we outsource ambition? How about a new aesthetic? How can we better protect our audience from our own inclination to impose our best, however misguided, intentions? Or do we just let the machine continue to execute its commands ad infinitum? Transcribe. Cut and paste. Execute objective. Drop fish in pail. Plunk. If, then, again...



ACT III

THE MANIFESTO

During Act III, our moderator, Ain Gordon, casually proposed that we write a manifesto, and this inspired our resident Documentary Artist, Jay Kirk—an avid reader of manifestos, believer in none-to single-handedly take up the gauntlet. The author submits here the first draft to his fellow Experimentalists and welcomes modification and/or feedback. While in no way intended as anything as actually rigid or absolute as the word “manifesto” might imply, the thoughts put down here could be seen as a confession of the sort of internal encouragements, goads, and creative permission slips the writer sometimes uses to carve out his own niche each morning. While he trusts a number of his points will resonate with the others, the author also recognizes that these ideas were recorded with a bias toward his own field, or orientation, aka nonfiction, aka reality-based literature. This manifesto is, of course, open to discussion and revision during Act IV.

- Mind is our only subject
- The mind is objective reality
- Perception is character
- Meaning is only fleeting context
- Art generates awareness, and that's enough
- Reject everything you revere
- Reframe your rejection as content
- Liberate your practice by rejecting less
- Embrace the demands of “narrative”

- Trade your platinum shackles for a golden straight jacket
- Own it
- Reality is the material to which we orient ourselves: our style indicates how willing or unwilling we are to accept this truth
- The experience of experience itself
- If we must prefer: we prefer discovery to invention
- Nothing is ever consciously invented
- Cf. Wallace Stevens: "In the presence of extraordinary actuality, consciousness takes the place of imagination."
- The imagination is the gangplank to actuality
- It's not about fiction vs. nonfiction. It's about the deep blur between the subjective & objective
- It's about gaining ground by erasing boundaries between perception and the known
- Paranoia is useful in moderation
- Do not worry about separating character from action (this was always a bad idea)
- Throw yourself away
- We are all ventriloquists

- Do not fetishize the ordinary but yet: the ordinary is extraordinary and vice versa
- Atonality does not exist
- Consider the remake as a subgenre worthy of further development (Casa blanca as directed by David Lynch/ Don Quixote as rewritten by Pierre Menard)
- Is a string quartet fiction or non fiction?
- The transliteration of the mind: easier said than done.
- If you must believe in something, believe in un-grasping
- Aspire to seize fewer ideas
- Subvert your personal mythologies
- Defuse the archetypes
- The rational and irrational/absurd are not incompatible—they are logically interdependent
- Spare us your aphorisms
- The fully executed and nothing less
- Performance art infiltrates all fields
- Any effect that brings about greater actuality

- Depend more on the autodiegetic (self as character as narrator)
- Use as many personae as possible to penetrate the actual self
- Never settle on the question of the self
- Who was it that said music is the bridge to the insentient world? I say that too
- Blur out the introverted perversions
- Be abrupt
- There is more power in a well-crafted transition (stanza break, white space) than any metaphor
- Go for the rude juxtaposition
- Find joy in mutation
- Revel in discovered error
- Error and correction are dynamic, cheerful companions
- Getting it wrong in no way negates getting it right (compatible values)
- There is an explanation for everything, but you are under no obligation to explain anything
- Make violent (aesthetic) choices
- Any attempt to organize the "other" is a recipe for the absurd (see Camus)

- We are not for anything. We are is
- It's about not being "viewy" (in the words of Ezra Pound)
- It's about simultaneously immersing and then yanking oneself (in and) out
- Kill your pieties
- Seek new alliances
- Make the layers perceptible (reveal the archeology of yr own mind)
- Embrace both particle (particular) and beam (universal)
- Seek out the point of divergence between experience and memory
- Perception alone is a worthy subject



ACT IV

THE LAYOVER

Let's not beat around the bush. This document is the only thing that will be left after our experiment has concluded. This report has, in a manner of speaking, final say. So what of it? What can we trust of this document to convey the truth of Act IV? Was there really an Act IV? Is it silly to ask? Well, that much is verifiable. That much can be fact-checked. If you liked, if you tried, you could track down our names, our phone numbers, at least our emails. You could independently verify the date. Careful examination of calendar appointments, receipts, phone records, security camera footage, etc., would readily yield the whereabouts, our whereabouts, and only a slightly more rigorous effort, combined with a rudimentary knowledge of forensics, might let you corroborate certain things said, ideas floated, postures taken, certain mid-thought retractions. But unless our collective life rights are purchased at some day in the future, and a film is made of the proceedings, or one of us puts on Act IV as a dance performance, or a small theater piece, or an oratorio, hopefully to wide and clamorous review, this will be the only trace.

Of course, there may be rumors, issued by detractors from within our ranks, which contradict the report. But any other interpretation will inevitably find itself compared to the subjective authority of this official document. This is the formal trace. But, you ask, and quite intelligently I think, is it the form (this form) or the content (watch it accumulate despite our best intentions) that transmits the essence of our penultimate act?

And so then I must ask, "Do you know whether you're reading this for its content or

for its form?"

Perhaps, being a reader who tires, as we all sometimes do, of reports calibrated exclusively toward the plain exposition of things, you're reading to get a sense of body language, of subliminal motion, or the physical grammar of our characters, the kinetic indiscretions and "tells" with which we inadvertently telegraph our Act IV selves to one another, as we stand inside the spacious room, and where, did I mention, there was placed a pink conch?

It was a giant conch shell, with fur suggestively glued around its gastropod aperture, pinkly flared. It was of unknown origin. That is to say, it was already there in the room—the conch was waiting when we arrived. I don't know if it was plaster or prehistoric. It looked real. The fur was fake, alpaca white. But this is only a detail, and one with little significance, so why do I why submit it here? Well, perhaps to point out how any detail will distort the surface—such as the details of our particular exercise today, which I'm getting to—and that form is stretched by the objects one notices, in this case the form of the room, the form of each other's presence, now watch as it bends under the pressure of each detail, just as the imaginary net of gravity warps under the heft of planets—it is such bending that accounts for time—much as we ourselves, the planetary participants, alter the space around us as we pace and circle over the spacious floor.

Which brings me to the exercise, and, really, it is the best idea any of us have yet brought to our experiments. It is the idea of our theater director, who—that most charming and affable man—do you know, flew back from LA early just to be with us today? our peers.

As I recall, during the exercise, he did not direct our attention to the conch. It wasn't necessary. So consider that detail irrelevant. What's relevant is that there is room to roam, to wheel, to satellite around one another, as we play a sort of improv tag, first circling, then gently colliding, alternately avoiding, ignoring the giant conch, all as the exercise demands, walking backward, moving sideways, with purpose and/or not, allowing ourselves to glance off one another's bodies, just to acknowledge that we are physically in the room, together.

It is kind of the best thing ever.

But it only gets better, because we next begin the collective transformation of the room by bringing in other details, describing for one another the layout of our childhood homes, our childhood beds, the mulberry tree in the front lawn, the creaky feel of the hallway, the radiator, the angle of morning sunlight in the dining room, our hands pausing around the hi-fi memory of our parents' stereo, and that one Edith Piaf album.

That's how it was.

We observe each other as we try to explain the art of watching TV, as we try to define what a woman is, or to justify our political affiliations. We coax one another out of the self-consciousness that owning up to content so often imposes, in order to better experience the pure form of experiencing memory.

Getting past content really is best if you want to get to the more cinematic pleasure of faces and the rhythm of gesture. What

counts today is rhythm, language subordinate to gesture, the way our hands move in childish circles, the way commas drop from our mouths as we recall our English grandmother's white lace, the way one foot comes forward when we hesitate, shake our head, caught between the burden of performance and genuine remembering, struck by the way our bodies confess the past tense, with a tone of wistful resignation.

The real performers among us find the spectacle of the nonperformers hilarious. And quite instructive. Our performance is dazzling in the white room: a brilliant layover between endless destinations.

Speaking of which, did I already mention that the author of today's exercise flew back early from LA just to be here today? I think it's worth mentioning twice. And it is funny to think about: that one would rush to make it to a carefully scheduled layover, which is exactly what this is—a deliberate space for reverie, a wedge of space to exist between things, for which discovery is the entire point of the exercise. We would not miss this one for anything. To be in this room with

You could say this is the value of our entire experiment. This is the grand success of the experiment. It is not a destination, but a layover. And once you've mastered the art of the layover, you've mastered the art of Act IV.



ACT V

A FINAL REPORT:
THE ARCHIVE OF GESTURES

We are in a square room, at a rectangular table, but it is not the usual rectangular table. It is a new table on the other side of the old city, and it has a curious construction, in that the table itself, cleverly composed as it is, is actually assembled out of a number of puzzle shapes, which makes me think it was originally made as one table and then divided into these separate puzzle components. In fact, to be honest, the table does not cohere very well as a unit and keeps shifting around whenever people try to set down their coffee, or lean against it to read—as when our curator first wanted to read from the Act 3 Manifesto, but then we read from our Act One Report instead as a way to begin, or, I suppose, as a way to recognize that we have come to the end. Perhaps to give us a sense of narrative arc.

But, like I said, the table does not cohere all that well, so I have to wonder if it's a metaphor for our experiment as a whole. Did it, did we, cohere? Or, in the end, do we remain just a bunch of artists cleverly thrown together? I am still not sure. I only wish there were more time to think it over.

As our choreographer speaks, as she gives a final report of her own work, on what she calls the "Archive of Gestures," a solution begins to emerge in my mind. Hers is a better process, I think, than my own. The language of movement is less hung-up and stuffy than is the medium of words, which can be so, too—you know—overly cautious. This is more or less what I think as we follow her down the long corridor which she has projected in video on the wall. At the end of the corridor is a gallery. And in the corner is a bed. A cot, I guess. A bed

in the corner of a gallery. It is where we find her lying down. Lying down, we intuitively understand, is the first gesture in her archive. Then she moves about on the bed restlessly, feet at the headboard, flailing, grasping the sides, as if clinging to a piece of flotsam in the sea. Then she flips over and climbs the wall with her toes. It is the choreography of asylum, incarceration, the claustrophobia of corners and tangled sheets. Standing on bed. Falling on bed. Stuck on bed. Writhing on bed. She makes a portrait of one gesture and then another: choke, drain, hate, rake, purge, rave, sob, bliss, fly, crave, dig, take, hold, crush, break, pour. A gesture for saying: I am comfortable being an object in this installation. The archive is comprehensive. On her knees now, at the foot of the mattress, her hands describe the inside of an invisible barrel suspended overhead, fingers probing the inside of this void, then the outer drum. She cowers as if it might drip on her. A moment later, her hands, busy, work at the loose ball of knotted something in her palm, yarn maybe, a ball of rubber bands, or, oh I see, she is holding a bird in each hand. One close to her heart, held in, like a deck of cards, the other held out, each offered in turn, as if she is asking us to make an utterly impossible choice.

There is a dance of equivalences, minor adjustments, in the motion of being: it is a reflection of our tendency toward internal symmetry (I guess). One hand, arm, seems to feel the need to resolve the other. One comes forward. One moves back. There is an idea, and then the idea's correction.

Anyway. That is the archive of gestures. Stupendously catalogued. And quite resonant for the rest of us who have been talking about archives all along—the word crops up all the

time. Everybody is an archivist nowadays. Preparing the archive has become the main act. It is no longer just a warm up, it is the work itself. It is also our anxiety. It is our collective dilemma. There are too many potential nuances to select definitively. Too many possible arrangements. We worry about appropriation: when is it appropriate to appropriate, and how angry can I get at those who have plundered my own archives (especially if for fame and profit). Is this why the idea of archives in general is so of the zeitgeist?

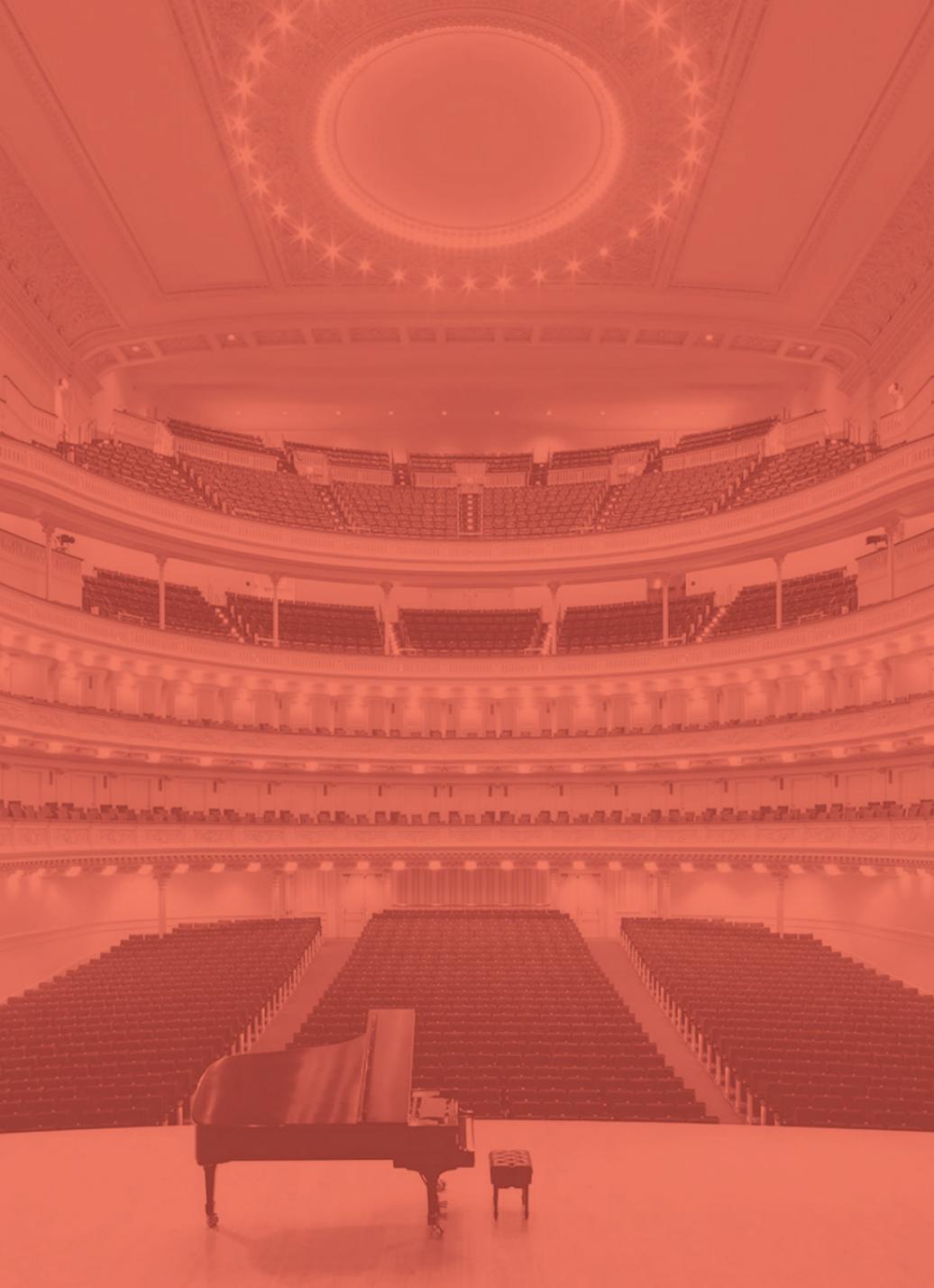
Like the choreographer, who has compiled this archive as part of her research, we are all, to a degree, motivated by the same impulse—to compile, to index, to dwell in research more.

Maybe it's because we have more material than instinct for what to do with it all so we can only think in terms of "process." The problem is our technology, no doubt, if you want my diagnosis. No wonder our own archives are vast: our machines have already been collaborating for some time now. But there is nothing new about this idea, and that's the problem with ideas today. New ideas are practically born with an archival mustiness on their baby's breath. But, again, that's why we can find refuge in process alone. One can divest oneself from ideas a little. If there is nothing new that can come out of ideas—ideas require at least the illusion of being new, if only for a few minutes—the only way to keep it all alive is to keep it whirling in the large hadron masher.

But now that I think about it, we have already had our own collider up and running in here over the past fifteen months and five acts. We have already begun to whirl. So, for goodness sake, dear colleagues, perhaps what we should really do, is to just stay put a little while

longer...? We can hardly just pack up and go now can we? I mean, not now that we've discovered that we may in fact be each other's most natural collaborators. Not now that we finally understand why we've been brought together into the same room...

And, besides, look, there are a few pastries left. A few of those fresh berries that you like behind the cantaloupe rind... Let us drag in a few more cots and stay the night if we must. No, please, I implore you, hear me out... You see, we did things entirely out of order—an experiment is supposed to be research first. We can't go now, not with so much left on the table. Which, yes, look, I can fix it... See, the parts of the table—we can make the parts fit at last. Just a little wood glue, see, good as new! It coheres! Please stay. Just another hour... Don't you see how entangled we have become? The time to finally get down to work has arrived. At least, at least, can we plan to come in for a sixth act? I am free the second half of July. Why end on Act V? It is not a symmetrical number.



WHO'S WHO IN THE CAST

The nine principal actors shall remain anonymous.









AIN GORDON (Director) has worked as a playwright, director, and actor since 1984. He is known for creating theatrical works focused on people, places and events that have been lost or otherwise forgotten in the “official” historical record. Notable works include *In This Place...*, inspired by the real-life story of the first free African-Americans who built their own home in Lexington, KY; and *A Disaster Begins*, about a lone woman’s relationship with the Galveston, TX hurricane of 1900 and the subsequent deadly flood. In 2013, with the support of The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, the Painted Bride Art Center in Philadelphia commissioned Gordon to write *If She Stood*, which was based on the stories of the city’s early female abolitionists. Among Gordon’s many accolades are three Obie Awards, two NYFA Fellowships, and a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in Playwriting. He has been a core writer of the Playwrights’ Center, artist-in-residence at the Center for Creative Research, co-founder of Urban Memory Project, and co-director of Pick Up Performance Co(s). Gordon’s work has been produced at theaters throughout the country, and he was the Center’s inaugural Visiting Artist from 2011–13, which sought to create a model for an imaginative and compelling relationship between a grant-making organization and an artist through creative discourse and an ongoing exchange of ideas. During his time at the Center, Gordon oversaw the *White Box Residencies* project.

JAY KIRK (Creative Documentarian) is the author of *Kingdom Under Glass* (Picador, 2010). His frequently anthologized nonfiction has been published in *Harper’s*, *GQ*, *New York Times Magazine*, and *Nerve*. He was a recipient of a 2005 Pew Fellowship, and teaches in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Pennsylvania. His forthcoming book, *Bartok’s Monster*, will be published by Harper Perennial in 2016.

MARK BEASLEY (Guest) is a curator and writer from the United Kingdom who is now based in New York. He is currently curator-at-large at Performa, the only biennial dedicated to commissioning, presenting, and exploring new visual art performance across disciplines. His recent projects there

include Frances Stark and Mark Leckey's *Put a Song in Your Thing* at Abrons Theater; Robert Ashley's *That Morning Thing* at the Kitchen; Mike Kelley's *Day Is Done* at Judson Church; Arto Lindsay's *Somewhere I Read*; and the experimental music festival, co-curated with Mike Kelley, *A Fantastic World Superimposed on Reality*. As a curator with Creative Time he curated *Plot09: This World & Nearer Ones*; *Hey Hey Glossolalia: Exhibiting the Voice*; and Javier Tellez's critically acclaimed film *A Letter on the Blind*. In 2011, he established the Malcolm McLaren Award at Performa, presented by Lou Reed to Ragnar Kjartansson. He is currently a fine arts Ph.D. candidate at Reading University, UK. His first LP with the group Big Legs is forthcoming on the London- and Amsterdam-based Junior Aspirin Records. Beasley co-facilitated, with Kathleen McLean, the 2013 iteration of the Center's project *No Idea Is Too Ridiculous*, and he contributed to *Pigeons on the Grass: Contemporary Curators Talk About the Field*, published by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage in 2013.

ANN CARLSON (Guest) is an artist whose award-winning work defies description. Borrowing from dance, performance, theater, visual and conceptual art, it takes the form of solo performance, site-specific projects, ensemble theatrical works, and performance/video. Carlson is the recipient of over thirty commissions and numerous awards, including a 2015 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, a 2015 National Dance Project Award, multiple years of support from the Creative Capital's MAP fund program; a USA Artist Award; a Guggenheim Fellowship; a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship; and the first CalArts Alpert Award in Choreography. Carlson is currently in residence at the Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA making "The Symphonic Body," an orchestral work built entirely from gestures.

MEGAN E. CARTER (Thinking Partner) is an experienced Off-Broadway producer and dramaturge. From 2006-2013, she served as the Associate Artistic Director of Women's Project Theater where she had the dual role of production dramaturge and line producer for more than 30 world premieres, developmental productions, workshops, and readings. In addition to managing new play development and playwright commissions, Carter also led the WP Lab for Playwrights, Directors, and Producers, a celebrated

professional development and mentoring program for a diverse group of early to mid-career theatre artists. Carter has collaborated with directors Tea Alagic, Anne Bogart, Lear deBessonet, and Gaye Taylor Upchurch, to name a few, and with such companies as SITI Company, terra NOVA collective, Classic Stage Company, Intiman Theatre, and ACT Theatre, among others. She is currently on faculty at the SITI Conservatory and the Einhorn School for Performing Arts.

LYNNE COOKE (Thinking Partner) is Senior Curator for Special Projects in Modern Art at the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. She served as chief curator and deputy director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid from 2008 to 2012 and as curator at Dia Art Foundation from 1991 to 2008. In 1991, Cooke cocurated the Carnegie International, and has helmed numerous major shows since, including the 10th Biennale of Sydney (1996), the traveling exhibition *Rosemarie Trockel: Cosmos* (2012), and *Cristina Iglesias: A Place of Reflection*, recently on view at the Casa França-Brasil in Rio de Janeiro. She is currently working on a project researching the interface between mainstream and outlier artists in the United States in the twentieth century.

KRISTY EDMUNDS (Thinking Partner) is the executive and artistic director of the Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA. She is recognized for innovation and depth in the presentation of works by contemporary artists, with a particular emphasis on contemporary performing arts. She began serving as artistic and executive director of the UCLA Live performance series in 2011, and has worked as the consulting artistic director for the newly formed Park Avenue Armory in New York since 2009. Edmunds was instrumental in founding the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA) and its TBA Festival (Time Based Art) in Oregon in 1995. She later served as artistic director for the Melbourne International Arts Festival from 2005–08, and was the first to serve an unprecedented four-year term. Edmunds was The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage's Pew Fellowships panel chair in 2012 and 2013, and was the Center's first Visiting Scholar in 2015.

KENNETH GOLDSMITH (Thinking Partner) is the author of ten books of poetry, founding editor of the online archive Ubu-Web, and the editor of *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, which is the basis for an opera, "Trans-Warhol," that premiered in Geneva in March of 2007. *Publishers Weekly* deemed his writing among the most exhaustive and beautiful collage work yet produced in poetry. From 1996-2009, Goldsmith was the host of a weekly radio show on New York City's WFMU. He is a senior editor of PennSound, the online poetry archive at the University of Pennsylvania. He held The Anschutz Distinguished Fellow Professorship in American Studies at Princeton University for 2009-10 and received the Quartz Electronic Music Award in Paris in 2009. In 2011, he co-edited, *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (Northwestern University Press) and published a book of essays, *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age* (Columbia University Press). In May 2011, he was invited to read at The White House for President and Mrs. Obama's "A Celebration of American Poetry." Goldsmith participated in dOCUMENTA(13) in Kassel, Germany, 2012. In 2011, dOCUMENTA(13) published his book *Letter To Bettina Funcke* as part of its *100 Notes - 100 Thoughts*. In 2013, he was appointed the Museum of Modern Art's first Poet Laureate.

VIJAY IYER (Thinking Partner) is a Grammy-nominated composer-pianist whose recent honors include a 2013 MacArthur Fellowship, a 2012 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, an unprecedented "quintuple crown" in the 2012 Down Beat International Critics Poll (winning Jazz Artist of the Year, Pianist of the Year, Jazz Album of the Year, Jazz Group of the Year, and Rising Star Composer categories), the Pianist of the Year Awards for both 2012 and 2013 from the Jazz Journalists Association, and the 2013 ECHO Award (the "German Grammy") for best international pianist. Previously, Iyer was voted the 2010 Musician of the Year by the Jazz Journalists Association, and named one of 2011's "50 Most Influential Global Indians" by *GQ India*. His other honors include the Greenfield Prize, the Alpert Award in the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, the India Abroad Publisher's Special Award for Excellence, and numerous composer commissions. A polymath whose career has spanned the sciences,

the humanities, and the arts, Iyer received an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in the cognitive science of music from the University of California, Berkeley. In 2014 he began a permanent appointment at Harvard University's Department of Music, as the Franklin D. and Florence Rosenblatt Professor of the Arts.

MARY JANE JACOB (Thinking Partner) is an American curator, writer, and educator from Chicago. She is a professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and is the Executive Director of Exhibitions and Exhibition Studies. She has held posts as Chief Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Since 1990 Jacob has been a pioneer in the areas of public, site-specific, and socially engaged art. Jacob is the author and editor of many key texts including *Conversations at the Castle: Changing Audiences and Contemporary Art* (1996) and *Culture in Action: New Public Art in Chicago* (1993). Jacob has mounted exhibitions, and created public art opportunities that have featured the work of some of the most influential artists in contemporary art including Mark Dion, Suzanne Lacy, Ernesto Pujol, J. Morgan Puett, Pablo Helguera, Marina Abramović, Rick Lowe, and Alfredo Jaar. The Women's Caucus for Art honored Jacob as a 2010 recipient of the organization's Lifetime Achievement Award. Jacob received her M.A. in the History of Art and Museum Studies from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

DANIEL ALEXANDER JONES (Thinking Partner) is an award-winning interdisciplinary artist. *American Theatre Magazine* named him one of fifteen artists whose work would "change American stages for decades to come." He is the recipient of the prestigious Alpert Award in the Arts in Theatre for 2006. His theater pieces include *Phoenix Fabrik*, *Bel Canto*, *Earth-births*, *Blood:Shock:Boogie*, and *Cab and Lena*. Daniel has performed nationally in numerous cities including New York, Minneapolis, Austin, St. Paul, Seattle, and Boston and internationally in London, Dublin, Manchester, and Leeds. He collaborates regularly with other artists including Walter Kitundu, Grisha Coleman, Helga Davis, Sharon Bridgforth, Erik Ehn, and Robbie McCauley. Jones is the recipient of support from The Rockefeller Foundation, The National Endowment for the Arts, TCG, The Creative Capital

Foundation, The Howard Foundation, and The Jerome Foundation. Jones is a faculty member with Goddard College's Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Arts and has been an Adjunct Faculty member with The Department of Theatre and Dance since 2004. A native of Massachusetts, Jones splits his time between Austin and New York City.

MARC BAMUTHI JOSEPH (Thinking Partner) is an inaugural recipient of the United States Artists Rockefeller Fellowship, the winner of the 2011 Alpert Award in Theatre, and an inaugural recipient of the Doris Duke Performing Artist Awards. He is the founding Program Director of the exemplary non-profit Youth Speaks, and is a co-founder of Life is Living, a national series of one day festivals designed to activate under-resourced parks through hip hop arts and focused environmental action. Joseph recently premiered the Creative Time commission *Black Joy in the Hour of Chaos* in New York's Central Park, and is currently completing new works for the Chatauqua Symphony, Opera Philadelphia, and South Coast Repertory Theater, while serving as Chief of Programs and Pedagogy at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco. His evening length piece */peh-LO-tab/* has been commissioned by the Kennedy Center and will premiere at YBCA in the Fall of 2016.

DAVID LEVINE (Thinking Partner) is an artist based in New York and Berlin, whose work encompasses theater, performance, video, and photography. His performance projects have been seen at MoMA, Mass MoCA, Documenta XII, PS122, the Watermill Center, Tanya Leighton Gallery, and Blum & Poe, and his video and photographic work has been seen at Cairo's Townhouse Gallery, HAU2 (Berlin), ISCP (New York), TPW Gallery (Toronto), and the Goethe Institut New York. He received a 2013 Village Voice OBIE Award for his installation *Habit*, and was a 2013–14 Fellow in Visual Arts at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. He was awarded a 2007 Kulturstiftung des Bundes grant for Bauerntheater, and a 2009 Etant Donnés grant for *Venice Saved: a Seminar*, which premiered at PS122. His work has been featured or reviewed in *Frieze*, *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *The Believer*, *Bomb*, *Theater*, and

Mousse, and he has published artists' projects and essays in *Convulsions*, *Cultural Politics*, *Triple Canopy*, and *Cabinet*. In 2008 he taught as a guest professor at the Institute for Theatre Studies of the Free University of Berlin, and has conducted guest seminars and lectures at Bard College, Harvard University, the Goethe-Institut Berlin, Brecht-Haus Berlin, and the Hamburg University of Music and Theatre. He holds an MA in English Literature from Harvard University.

KEN LUM (Thinking Partner) was born in Vancouver, Canada but presently resides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where he is a Professor in the School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania. From 2000 to 2006, he was head of the graduate program in studio art at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, where he taught from 1990 until 2006. Lum joined the faculty of Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, in 2005, and worked there until 2007. He has been an invited professor at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris; the Akademie der Bildenden Kunst, Munich; California College of the Arts, San Francisco; and the China Art Academy, Hangzhou. Lum is co-founder and founding editor of *Yishu Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*. He has published extensively, and recently completed an artists' book project with philosopher Hubert Damisch that was launched with Three Star Press, Paris. Lum was Project Manager for Okwui Enwezor's *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945–1994* (2001). He was also co-curator of the 7th Sharjah Biennial (2005), and *Shanghai Modern: 1919–1945* (2005). Lum has exhibited widely, including São Paulo Biennial (1998), Shanghai Biennale (2000), Documenta 11 (2002), the Istanbul Biennial (2007), and the Gwangju Biennale (2008), Moscow Biennial 2011, and the Whitney Biennial 2014. He has published many essays on art. He has also realized permanent public art commissions for the cities of Vienna, Vancouver, Utrecht, Leiden, St. Moritz, Toronto, and St. Louis.

PEPÓN OSORIO (Guest) is best known for his large-scale baroque and polemically charged installations that merge conceptual art and community dynamics. Osorio's work emphasizes the exhibition space as an intermediary between the social architecture of communities and the mainstream art world. He has worked

with well over 25 communities across the U.S. and internationally, creating installations based on real life experiences. For almost two decades Pepón Osorio has been presenting work in unconventional places prior to exhibiting in a museum setting, thus exploring the subjectivity of meaning in art and the multiple meanings that these installations achieve depending on their location.

EIKO OTAKE (Thinking Partner) is a choreographer, director, performer, teacher, and writer who, for over forty years, has partnered with Takashi Koma Otake as Eiko & Koma. To date, Eiko & Koma have created 46 interdisciplinary performance works on their own bodies, three pieces for other dancers, seven “media dances” (dances specially created for the camera), and seven video documentaries. From 2009 to 2012, Eiko & Koma presented a multi-venue, multi-faceted Retrospective Project that included creating new performance works, installations, exhibitions, and media works; restaging old works; presenting media showings, panels, and lectures; as well as publishing a comprehensive monograph of their works. Eiko & Koma have received a MacArthur Fellowship (1996), the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award (2004), the Dance Magazine Award (2006), and the first United States Artists Fellowship (2006). Eiko is a Founding Fellow of the Center for Creative Research and has taught at Wesleyan University.

JAMES PHELAN (Thinking Partner) is Distinguished University Professor of English at Ohio State. He teaches and writes about the English and American novel, especially from modernism to the present, nonfiction narrative, and narrative theory. He is the first person in the history of the English Department to be awarded both the Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award (2007) and the Distinguished Scholar Award (2004). He is the author of seven books that develop and apply the contours of a rhetorical theory of narrative, including *Living to Tell About It* (2005), *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (2007), and *Reading the American Novel, 1920-2010*. He edits *Narrative*, the journal of the International Society for the Study of Narrative, and, with Peter J. Rabinowitz and Robyn Warhol, co-edits the Ohio State University Press book series, *The Theory and Interpretation of Narrative*. Phelan has also edited or co-edited numerous volumes,

including *Teaching Narrative Theory* (with David Herman and Brian McHale), *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative* (with Jakob Lothe and Susan R. Suleiman), and *Fact, Fiction, and Form: Selected Essays of Ralph W. Rader* (with David H. Richter).

CHRISTOPHER ROBBINS (Guest) works on the uneasy cusp of public art and international development, creating sculptural interventions in the daily lives of strangers. He uses heavy material demands and a carefully twisted work process to craft awkwardly intimate social collaborations. He has lived and worked in London, Tokyo, West Africa, the Fiji Islands, and former Yugoslavia; built his own hut out of mud and sticks and lived in it while serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Benin, West Africa; and spoken at a United Nations conference about his cross-cultural work in the South Pacific. As a way of probing the troubling power dynamics he witnessed in his cross-cultural work, Robbins co-founded the Ghana ThinkTank in 2006. With the mission “Developing the First World,” the group collects problems in the so-called “Developed” world, and sends them to think tanks they established in Cuba, Ghana, Iran, Mexico, El Salvador, and the U.S. prison system, to analyze and solve. Then they work with the communities where the problems originated to implement those solutions—whether they seem impractical or brilliant. The Ghana ThinkTank was awarded a Creative Capital Grant in 2013, and presented at the 2014 Creative Time Summit.

BARTLETT SHER (Thinking Partner) is a director whose credits include *Golden Boy* (Tony nomination); *Blood and Gifts*; *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*; *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (Tony nom.); *South Pacific* (Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics awards; also London and Australia); *Awake and Sing!*, *The Light in the Piazza* (Tony noms.). Recent New York credits include *The Bridges of Madison County* (SchoenfeldO), *Prayer for My Enemy* (Playwrights Horizons), *Waste* (Best Play Obie Award), *Cymbeline* (Callaway Award, also at Royal Shakespeare Company), *Don Juan*, *Pericles* (IFANA, BAM). Artistic director of Seattle's Intiman Theater from 2000 to 2009, and was previously company director for the Guthrie Theater and associate artistic director at Hartford Stage. Sher's opera credits include *Faust* (Baden Baden); *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, *Le Comte*

Ory, *L'Elisir d'Amore* (Metropolitan Opera); *Romeo et Juliette* (Salzburg, Milan, Chicago); and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (Seattle Opera, New York City Opera).

MAC WELLMAN (*Thinking Partner and Guest*) is an American playwright, author, and poet. He is best known for his experimental work in the theater which rebels against theatrical conventions, often abandoning such traditional elements as plot and character altogether. His plays frequently resemble a moving collage of events, which has more in common with an avant-garde dance production than Broadway-style theater. Wellman is the Donald I. Fine Professor of Play Writing at Brooklyn College, New York City, and in 2010 he became a CUNY Distinguished Professor.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage would like to extend its sincere gratitude to the nine arts practitioners who made a fifteen-month commitment to this experiment. We were pleased to hear from them in their feedback that they considered it time well spent.

We'd also like to thank the special guests—Mark Beasley, Ann Carlson, Pepón Osorio, Christopher Robbins—and those who served as thinking partners, all of whom are listed in the “Who’s Who” section of this booklet. We expect that many of the working relationships formed during this process will long outlive it.

A number of the meetings were held at off-site locations. We are grateful to the staffs of Headlong Dance Theatre, Institute of Contemporary Art, Scribe Video Center, Slought, and Temple Contemporary, for their hospitality and assistance, particularly Robert Blackson, Sarah Biemiller, David Brick, Aaron Levy, Louis Massiah, and Gee Wesley. The incomparable Ellen Maher, from the Center’s staff, and the intrepid caterer Stacy Papa, ensured that the actors were well nourished, while Senior Executive Assistant Gianna Deluomo capably and patiently oversaw the near-impossible task of coordinating the schedules of many, very busy people.

Distinguished writer Jay Kirk (2005 Pew Fellow) agreed to the challenge of documenting an experiment that was invisible to all but the participants. This was no simple or easy task, and we are grateful to the creativity he brought to his reporting, a very literary form of non-fiction.

Peter Nesbett conceived of and developed this document to echo a ‘playbill,’ in keeping with *5 Acts*’ theatrical structure.

5 Acts would never have happened without the artful efforts of Ain Gordon. Directing with a deliberately light hand on set, he engaged a near continuous dialogue with the actors behind the scenes. At the invitation of the Center, he conceived of *5 Acts*’ goals and structure, conducted auditions (veiled as informal conversations), cast the participants, and then skillfully managed the effort from

start to finish, often from his home in New York City when he was not here with us. We hope that there will be many more fruitful occasions for Ain to interact with the Philadelphia art community that he has come to know and value in the most collegial way, and who have likewise come to know and value him.

ABOUT THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE

The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage (the Center) is a multidisciplinary grantmaker and hub for knowledge-sharing, dedicated to fostering a vibrant cultural community in Greater Philadelphia. The Center invests in ambitious, imaginative projects that showcase the region's cultural vitality and enhance public life, and we engage in an ongoing exchange of ideas concerning artistic and interpretive practice with a broad network of cultural practitioners and leaders.

Established in 2005, the Center makes Project grants in two areas, Performance and Exhibitions & Public Interpretation, while our twelve annual Fellowships provide unrestricted grants to individual artists working in all disciplines. The Center also awards multi-year Advancement grants to high-performing institutions undertaking bold, innovative organizational initiatives.

Center funding has made possible thousands of performing arts events, history and visual arts exhibitions, and other public programs for audiences in Philadelphia and its surrounding counties.

As a hub for the exchange of ideas and ongoing dialogue on issues critical to artistic practice, we present a lively range of activities. Our *Questions of Practice* research series of online essays and interviews, symposia and lectures, and in-depth publications explores evolving lines of inquiry that respond to our experience as cultural grantmakers. Through all of our knowledge-sharing activities, we aim to advance the arts and heritage fields and connect Philadelphia's cultural community with peers nationally and internationally.

The Center is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by The University of the Arts, Philadelphia.

Published by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage
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Editor: Peter Nesbett
Proofreader: Megan Wendell
Design: Forever Fresh, Philadelphia

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