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“Embodied Pedagogy” in Tim Miller’s Performance Workshops

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“Embodied Pedagogy” in Tim Miller’s Performance Workshops

by

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Abstract

Schmidt, Heidi (PhD, Department of Theatre & Dance)

“Embodied Pedagogy” in Tim Miller’s Performance Workshops

Dissertation directed by Dr. Bud Coleman

Tim Miller is known primarily as a solo performance artist and political activist. What is less known and understood is his teaching career, which has paralleled his performance career. Miller has facilitated performance creation workshops in hundreds of universities and community centers around the globe. Along with thousands of other participants, I have found them to be rich and profound experiences on scholarly, aesthetic and emotional levels. I argue that his educational work has had, and continues to have, a profound impact on individuals within the fields of theatre and performance studies and beyond.

Miller’s history as a solo performer and activist, his own statements about his pedagogy, and my observations as a workshop participant suggest a series of guiding questions for this study. What techniques does Miller employ to engage with and empower the voices and embodied experiences of the individuals that participate in his workshops? How do the methods of these workshops relate to Miller’s work as a solo performer and as an activist with ACT UP? At its most basic level, this study documents Miller’s teaching work in a variety of higher education workshop and performance contexts, investigates the structure and methodology of Miller’s workshop techniques, and identifies what characteristics the workshops share and how they differ, based on the contexts in which they occur.

I conducted thirty-seven oral history interviews with workshop participants in four residencies and case studies, the organizing faculty members, and Miller himself as the primary source material for this study. As an analytical frame, I identified six categories of inquiry: the body as memoir of personal and family history; the performance of self as an act of claiming individual identity; the immediacy of the personal narratives generated; the minimal performance style most suited to it; the relationship between these workshops and the goals and curricula of the universities and colleges where Miller most frequently teaches; and the importance of Miller's generosity as facilitator and his faith in the capacity for each group he works with to tell powerful, beautiful, and necessary stories of their own lives.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Embodied Pedagogy” in Tim Miller’s Performance

Creation Workshops

In the fall of 2008, I participated in a performance workshop facilitated by noted solo performer Tim Miller, hosted by the Department of Theatre at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Over the course of one week, fifteen to twenty students and community members engaged in a workshop and rehearsal process with Miller, resulting in the creation and performance of an evening of short autobiographical vignettes at the end of the week titled *Body Maps*. I found the workshop to be a rich and profound experience on scholarly, aesthetic and emotional levels. I was impressed by the aesthetic quality of the work created in such a compressed time period, grateful for the sense of community created so quickly in that rehearsal space, and intellectually curious about how the process functioned. Since that time, I have remained in contact with Miller and worked with him in several other workshop and performance situations, including a one-day workshop on campus at the University of Colorado Boulder, a three-day workshop at the 2012 Association for Theatre in Higher Education conference in Washington, D.C. (resulting in a performance on the National Mall), and a brief weekend workshop at Southern Methodist University, where Miller is a recurring guest artist.

Miller is known primarily as a solo performance artist, particularly for his role in the NEA Four controversy in the early 1990s. What many may not know is that his career as an educator and facilitator has been developing alongside his performance career. Miller has facilitated

workshops in universities and community centers around the globe. Despite the overriding scholarly focus on Miller's performance, I argue that his educational work has had, and continues to have, a profound impact on individuals within the fields of theatre and performance studies and beyond.

While this study is focused specifically on Miller's teaching work and pedagogy, a brief summary of his performing career provides a necessary grounding in the philosophical underpinnings of Miller's priorities as an artist and citizen that inform his pedagogy in the rehearsal room.

Since the beginning of his performance career in 1978 (the year he moved to New York), Miller has used personal narrative to understand and claim his own conflicted identity as a queer citizen of the United States. His performances have addressed queer invisibility under the Reagan administration; the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and '90s (and the governmental silence surrounding that crisis); and federal immigration policies under the Defense of Marriage Act that prevented queer Americans from sponsoring partners for green cards. Miller deftly weaves together the threads of his own personal narrative with these larger socio-political concerns. "I don't really think of what I do as 'performance art,'" he said in a 2003 interview. "I tell three or four stories and try to link them with some kind of metaphorical glue, and then share that with people" (*Beds* 258). Miller is a fierce advocate for gay rights, with a sense of the poetic, or "Whitmanic" (to use Tony Kushner's word):

Tim is self-declaring, self-critical, self-analytical, self-celebrating in the full-throated Whitmanic mode, democratically, expansively self-celebrating. Tim sings that song of the self which interrogates, with explosive, exploding,

subversive joy and freedom, the constitution and the borderlines of selfhood.

(qtd. in Miller, *Body Blows* x)

As a writer and performer, Miller is equal parts angry and optimistic, an “articulate conversationalist” (as Frederick Corey describes him [254]) with a remarkable intelligence who uses words like “juicy” and “super” in writing and in casual conversation, and uses exclamation points liberally. His sense of humor is inclusive of self-deprecation and puns. Miller also connects deeply with his audiences. I use “with” intentionally—Miller has a tendency to involve his audiences in his performances; sometimes by simply looking them in the eye while talking to them rather than shouting to an empty space just beyond them, sometimes as directly as sitting naked in the lap of an audience member for a moment of profound and uncomfortable intimacy, as he does in *My Queer Body*. I have opted to include direct quotes from Miller wherever possible, especially when his particular brand of wit is on display. It would be easy for a discussion of his career to become a bit too dry, or disembodied. Too dry an approach would not be in the spirit of Miller’s performances, which remind us that we are bodies, not just minds, and bodies are often messy.

His explicit descriptions of sexual encounters in his performances have made him the subject of controversy, particularly during the culture wars of the 1980s and ’90s, though many of the descriptions and critiques of his work used in these contexts are reductive at best. Sex, in Miller’s world, is part of this embodied, human experience we are all working our way through. In his case, descriptions of sexual desire and experience are alternately (and simultaneously) sweet, shocking, self-deprecating, poetic, and often very funny. Miller’s performative

descriptions of sex with other men in the age of AIDS can read as fierce acts of bravery that border on the miraculous.

Miller is also famous for his liberal use of nudity in his performances; so much so that Tony Kushner jokes in his Foreword to Miller's *Body Blows*, "As a tribute to Tim, I'm typing this naked" (ix). For Miller, performing naked is about acknowledging the fundamental humanity of the performer's body in the presence of the spectators' bodies:

The minute I take my clothes off in these performances—and I do in all of them except *Stretch Marks*—the whole theater changes. The spectators shift in their seats, stop breathing, become aware of their seat making their underwear stick to their legs. In my own work I am more interested in using my naked body as an avenue for exploring the most vulnerable, human, humorous, and fucked-up parts of myself than in using it as a seduction [. . .] A naked weenie or butt is not that interesting in itself but rather becomes important for us to look at as it reveals the feelings, complexity, desires, details, and revelations of our lives.

(Miller, *Body Blows* xxi)

Miller and others have published several articles, interviews, and essays regarding his biography, performance history, and artistic philosophy; a large portion of them are republished in Miller's 2006 collection *1001 Beds: Performances, Essays, and Travels*, edited by Glen Johnson. The collection also includes excerpts and performance scripts documenting the evolution of Miller's solo performance career, his involvement with ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power), and his teaching career (which developed alongside his performance and activism). Because the majority of the pieces included in this collection are authored by Miller,

it also provides an excellent resource to understand Miller's stated philosophy as a citizen artist. Miller has also published a collection of six of his performance scripts (2002's *Body Blows: Six Performances*). Frederick Corey's 2003 essay "Tim Miller's Body (of Work)" (*Text and Performance Quarterly*) also provides a useful overview and analysis of Miller's performance style and subject matter. The following biography of Miller's career as a performer, activist, and teacher is compiled from these sources, plus two personal interviews I conducted with Miller in October 2012 and January 2015.

Tim Miller As Performing Artist-Activist

Raised in Whittier, California, Tim Miller began journaling in fifth grade, establishing a lifelong habit of "writing daily about what happened to me" (*Beds* 3). In "Memory and Facing the Future," the essay which serves as a prologue to *1001 Beds*, he credits this lifelong habit of memoir as "every bit as important a detail about who I am as the fact that when I was fourteen I realized that I was gay and that it was my fate to love the boy next door" (*Beds* 3). This instinct for working through daily events via writing was reinforced when he read Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, his favorite book his sophomore year in high school. His fascination with the book, he writes in a parenthetical, "should have tipped everyone off right then that I was destined to be a naked performance artist!" (4).

I suppose I was inspired by Rousseau's urgent need in his *Confessions* to spill all the beans: his obsessive masturbation, his penchant for indecent exposure in public parks, and so on. I learned that as salubrious as it is to spew those garbanzos in the privacy of your own three-ring binder, it's even better to spread them out à la carte for all to see. Since the moment I did my first feverish

scribblings in my gay boy's adolescent journal, the crazed scrawl as panicky as a seismograph after an 8.1 earthquake, I have always seen writing about my life to be a fundamental act of knowing myself, of claiming space, and of simple survival. The act of remembering and sharing that memory with others became a crucial way to survive the shit that the world would strew in my path. (*Beds* 4)

Miller moved to New York in 1978, aged nineteen, intending to build a career as a dancer, but found himself unsatisfied with what he saw as a disconnect between the image-focused dance world and the larger socio-political context. In his "Professional Autobiography, 1990" (published in *1001 Beds*), he writes:

I had an expectation of what I wanted from the artists who were my elders, or what I thought an artist should be and what kind of job the artist had: to create work in a context of the world and of social events, especially for gay artists. I had just come from being in San Francisco right after the assassinations of Harvey Milk and George Moscone in 1978. (60)

He quickly abandoned the "postmodern cool of [. . .] images without politics, gesture without social action," as he later described it, and gravitated instead toward "the autobiographical personal political return to story and text which went on in the late '70s in New York, as people started to talk again and to tell stories and put value on what happens to people" (*Beds* 60; 70). Spalding Gray's work with the Wooster Group had "an enormous impact" on Miller: "Spalding's autobiography suddenly opened up the world to the incredible specificity of everyone's lives. What we can create from what happens to us can be done cheaply and simply; it's transportable, it's subversive, it's all kinds of things and can take all kinds of forms" (*Beds* 61).

In 1979 (or 1980—accounts differ), Tim Miller, Charles Moulton, Charles Dennis, and Peter Rose, converted an abandoned New York public school in the East Village into Performance Space 122. PS 122 quickly became (and remains) a significant center for experimental performance. Some of Miller's early work with PS 122 garnered enough positive critical attention that he felt like the "golden boy of performance art" at a very young age (*Beds* 62). While this kind of attention was helpful to Miller in building his reputation, it also led to what he has called his "Hollywood period": a "bloated, though well-intentioned, interdisciplinary spectacle" (*Cost of Living*, 1983) and a "mega-big-budget flop" (*Democracy in America*, 1984) (*Body Blows* xxvi-xxvii).

These failures and the growing crisis around AIDS led to major shifts for Miller in the years that followed. "With AIDS rattling the windows, I knew I had a big job to do as a queer artist. I did not assume that I would live to see the age of thirty. It was at this point in my journey that my concerns, social vision, and performance inclinations really jelled" (Miller, *Body Blows* xxvii). Miller moved back to Los Angeles in 1986, where he became active with ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), co-founded Highways Performance Space in Santa Monica in 1989 (with Linda Frye Burnham), and continued to develop his performance work, which he pared down to a "high-energy, stripped-down performance that relied on words, storytelling, and physical performance to make some sparks" (*Body Blows* xxvii).

ACT UP provided a rich avenue for Miller to combine his activism and his artistry. "A demonstration is every bit as good a reason to make a performance as creating it for opening night," as he writes in his "Professional Autobiography, 1990" (*Beds* 68). In addition to writing and creating performance pieces with political urgency, Miller was now taking those

performance techniques to the streets, often quite literally. These demonstrations also required a more goal-oriented approach than his earlier performance work, and the shift to creating political demonstrations that went beyond visibility to achieving a specific goal was “a new artist’s skill that I’ve had to learn” (*Beds* 65). One of those goals was to force East L.A.’s County Hospital to establish an AIDS ward, a goal Miller worked toward for two years. “I was arrested twice, and beaten up once by the police—but now in this county of nine million people, there is an AIDS ward” (Miller, *Beds* 68).

In a 1991 interview with Steven Durland (initially published in *The Drama Review* and reprinted in *1001 Beds*), Miller called his affiliation with ACT UP “my strongest identity” and “the single most influential thing in my life, as a model, as a worldview, as a kind of cultural practice. Especially since artists have played such a big role all over the country in forming this kind of political response, giving it spectacle” (*Beds* 117; 120). An example from a 1988 journal entry illustrates the kind of “spectacle” Miller alludes to:

I was in a demonstration a few weeks ago at the Federal Building here in L.A., an ACT UP action protesting the F.D.A. and Reagan’s limpdicted response to AIDS. We fell down in the streets and someone would trace our outline with chalk, and then the name of someone who had died would be written inside the form. There were thousands of these left all over that part of town by the time the hundreds of us were through. (*Beds* 74)

In 1990, a peer panel at the National Endowment for the Arts specializing in solo performance awarded grants to several performance artists, including Tim Miller. Within a few months, however, NEA Chairman John Frohnmayer overruled the recommendation of the peer

panel and denied grants to Miller and three other performance artists: Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, and John Fleck. Three of the artists are gay; all four deal with sexually explicit material that often challenges the cultural and political status quo regarding gender and sexuality; and the nation was in the midst of a culture war, in which conservative politicians worked to defund the NEA, or at least institute content restrictions for any artwork funded by the Endowment. The “NEA Four” believed their grants were denied for political reasons, and not for lack of artistic merit, and so filed suit against the Endowment, asking the courts to reinstate the grants. The lawsuit took eight years to reach the Supreme Court, and hinged primarily on whether Congressional clauses requiring NEA grant recipients adhere to “general standards of decency” were violations of the First Amendment. A federal judge in Los Angeles ruled the clause too vague and therefore unconstitutional in 1992; a higher court upheld that decision; the Clinton administration appealed and the case eventually landed at the Supreme Court in 1998. Miller describes the 1998 oral arguments at the Supreme Court:

Our lawyer David Cole [. . .] boldly spins the argument that the speech of artists needs to be protected even when the government has supported it with a grant. The decency rule “singles out art which has a nonconforming or disrespectful viewpoint. Government can’t impose an ideological screen” without abridging the First Amendment. The Justices seem skeptical of this notion, or that any “chilling effect” had really happened on account of this language. [. . .] It had taken an hour. After eight years of drama and hate mail and blabbing and death threats and demonstrations, it all ended up with the Supreme Court spending an hour on this subject. (*Beds* 108-9)

“The Supremes,” as Miller has called them, overturned the decisions of the lower courts, deciding that the clause was not a requirement, but a recommendation for the Endowment’s chairperson, and therefore did not violate the artists’ right to free speech (*Beds* 106).

The NEA Four, along with photographers Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe, became focal points of the George H. W. Bush era culture wars, and attained a significant level of notoriety. Elements of Miller’s work were taken out of context by the press and the political establishment alike, resulting in generalizations that were at best reductive, at worst entirely unfounded. Miller did continue to perform at the limited venues willing to risk their funding by presenting him, but he found audiences responded differently to his work than before the controversy; the publicity surrounding the NEA Four case primed them to be on the lookout for anything “potentially shocking or homoerotic or politically transgressive—and that ruined general audience response to the work for a period of six months or a year,” as he testified in a 1992 deposition (*Beds* 105). The case also took up a significant amount of Miller’s time and emotional energy, and prevented him from creating new work. From the 1992 deposition:

The total emotional drain of both being sought after for comment and talking about nothing that has anything to do with your work other than its potential controversy—that really knocked the hell out of being able to create any work. It threw me out of sync for probably a year. (*Beds* 104)

Since the resolution of the NEA Four case, Miller has continued to create new performance work that pulls from and directly addresses the urgencies in his own life, most notably advocating for immigration rights of binational queer couples. Until 2013, the Defense of Marriage Act prevented the federal government from legally recognizing queer relationships.

An American citizen could sponsor their opposite-sex spouse for a green card, but a queer citizen had no standing to sponsor their partner or spouse, even if legally married in a state that allowed it. Beginning with 1999's *Glory Box*, Miller's solo performances have been dominated by the possibility that Miller's Australian partner (now husband) Alistair McCartney would be deported and Miller forced into exile. The overturning of DOMA in 2013 marks the end of a chapter in Miller's personal and professional life; I look forward to discovering which avenue will prove most urgent to Miller and dictate the direction of the next stage of his performing career.

Tim Miller as Teacher

"I always taught a lot," Miller told me in 2012. He first began teaching performance creation workshops in Manhattan at the same time he began creating his first performance pieces. "I started making these pieces that I was doing, and then adapting some of my own strategies for how to give those prompts and extend those prompts to other people" (2012 interview). He was hired by NYU's Experimental Theatre Wing at age twenty-two, and taught at University of California Riverside when he returned to Los Angeles in the mid-80s. Miller's years in L.A. are when his teaching career really began to take off, much of it at Highways.

[Highways] became my perch for teaching workshops just as PS 122, the space I started in New York, was my workshop space. Starting these spaces for me was probably more having a space to teach than a space to perform. [. . .] Having the keys to a space that I was artistic director of, and that everyone was attracted to, in both of the big cities in the country, gave me a great space for my teaching to develop. (Miller, 2012 interview)

Miller began receiving Artist in the Community grants from the California Arts Council in the early 1990s to do free performance workshops for the gay men's community in Los Angeles County. These workshops were often incredibly large (up to eighty or ninety men at a time) representing a wide age range ("literally spanning from 16- and 17-year-olds to people who were in their early 80s who had come out when they were 79" [2012 interview]).

But it's really where I learned a few things about how this kind of work identifies, engenders, weaves community. Through the witnessing of our respective humanities, something that's really of the group starts to get built and generates powerful narratives and human connections, and love stories, and new kinds of theatre works. [. . .] And I learned a lot. I learned a huge amount there. It was really very meaningful to me. It was during the peak, the worst years of AIDS, so it was also a landscape where men who were in the group . . . almost a week didn't go by where someone who had been part of the group didn't die. So then the group was also participating and creating rituals and performances around mourning and memorials. It was super front line cultural work. [. . .] I think whatever good happens in these workshops, which I think a lot of good stuff happens both humanly and artistically and politically and all kinds of things. But that human piece of it is really, really important to me. How is this actually affecting our lives, and what kind of new community formations does it create?

(Miller, 2012 interview)

Miller also spent a significant amount of time in this period touring as a performer, which often included teaching as part of the package. In 1999, he was hired to conduct a two-

week performance creation workshop with five gay men in Birmingham, England, that was to result in an ensemble performance at “Queerfest,” a lesbian and gay cultural festival. This performance was “festively” titled “Suck, Spit, Chew, Swallow,” which is also the title of the chapter in *1001 Beds* in which Miller describes the workshop’s progression (155). As a two-week workshop with only five participants, the Birmingham residency varied from Miller’s usually shorter and larger processes. As a chapter in *1001 Beds*, “Suck, Spit, Chew, Swallow” provides a case study in miniature of a Miller-facilitated workshop. Several elements of Miller’s account of this workshop will echo in my own case studies in the chapters that follow. Miller writes of Carl, a 23-year-old schoolteacher who later confessed that it “took all his self-control, not to mention [Miller] bounding down three steps to capture him in an overeager American handshake, to keep him from bolting” (155); Miller’s own panic at the start of nearly every workshop he teaches (“Who am I to gather men to dig deep into their hearts and memories and bodies?”) and his awareness that the participants are “also frying in a griddle of panic and doubt. This evens the odds” (155); his deep awareness of the ways our bodies are socialized, “colonized and marketed” (154), and the “enormous damage” these pressures can do to our psyches (154).

Miller continued to teach workshops funded by the California Arts Council for about fifteen years, until significant budget cuts in c. 2005 eliminated many of these programs. During these same years, Miller’s began receiving more invitations from universities, where he continues to teach in short term residencies around the United States and (to a lesser extent) internationally. “I’ve been to so many schools, probably twenty a year. At least fifteen a year [. .

.] I did do the math. I have performed, lectured, done residencies at over six hundred universities and colleges” (Miller, 2012 interview).

More recently, universities are hiring Miller to “direct” devised productions as part of their production season, though this arrangement is still the exception, not the rule. *Litmus* at CU-Boulder, Chapter 4’s case study, is one example. Another is a project titled “VOX” that Miller co-created over a three-week period with students at Wake Forest University. Cynthia Gendrich, who teaches acting and directing at Wake Forest, described how the project came about:

[Miller] comes every other year – sometimes more often – and does a week long workshop that culminates in these amazing Saturday night performances. And we were finding that the audiences were always packed, and people would stay afterwards, just obviously moved, and talk for an hour. So we wanted that energy to be part of our season. [. . .] He came and did three weeks of this beautiful piece, and they had a regular two week run, and it was stunning. (qtd. in Coleman et al.)

Miller’s workshops draw a variety of participants, ranging from MFA students in actor training programs to gay men in community centers with no performance experience whatsoever. Despite the demographic differences, Miller finds “the different sites where I teach surprisingly similar. All are struggling with the same material: the challenge to claim body and self amid a culture that has other plans” (Miller, *Beds* 142). While universities and colleges constitute a large percentage of Miller’s current teaching work, he also continues to teach at arts centers and theaters, more so in the first few years of touring a new solo show. Regardless

of audience, however, Miller finds that “the template is pretty similar. [. . .] you’re still entering the space with that Peter Brooks-y empty space with fifteen to twenty people and their DNA and their ancestors and their multivalent identities and you start to see what happens” (2012 interview).

Thesis & Scope

Miller’s history as a solo performer and activist, his own statements about his pedagogy, and my observations as a participant in several of these workshops suggest a series of guiding questions for this study. How does Tim Miller employ techniques of performance and pedagogy to engage with and empower the voices and embodied experiences of the participants in his workshops? How do the methods of these workshops relate to Miller’s work as a solo performer and as an activist with ACT UP?

At its most basic level, this study proposes to document Miller’s teaching work in a variety of higher education workshop and performance contexts. I’m interested in the structure and methodology of Miller’s workshop techniques and how they have been deployed. What characteristics do all of these workshops share? In what ways do they differ based on the specific contexts in which they occur? How do these workshops function in relation to the educational curriculum of the universities in which they take place, and how do the participant/performers engage with, understand, and make later use of the workshop experience? To a lesser degree, this study also proposes to engage with the interplay among Miller’s solo performance work, his history of performative protest with ACT UP, and the educational work that is the focus of this dissertation. Are there ways in which these three threads of Miller’s career are inextricably linked?

As I have investigated the work Miller does in classrooms and studios throughout the country, several approaches, critical frames, and theoretical contexts have come to mind as possible avenues of exploration. These workshops and the performances that often result qualify as devised theatre, and Miller uses the phrase routinely in his own conversations about his work. Since his work often takes place within theatre programs at universities and colleges, it is tempting to analyze his pedagogy within the context of actor training. Miller's attention to the ways we store our personal and family histories within our bodies suggests a possible productive conversation with Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), and Miller references Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance* (2005) and the career of Jerzy Grotowski as influences on his performance and his teaching. Any of these avenues could provide useful frames of reference for analysis.

My preference, however, is to rely on Miller's own performance career and stated goals as frame and context for the case studies included in the next several chapters. Not as a hypothesis to test, but as a reference point (or series of reference points) to ground the reader in terms of participant experiences and how these workshops fit into the larger context of Miller's career. To that end, I have identified six elements or threads I would like to highlight: the body as memoir of personal and family history; the performance of self as an act of claiming individual identity and initiating transformation; the immediacy of the personal narratives generated; the minimal performance style most suited to it; the relationship between these workshops and the goals and curricula of the universities and colleges where Miller most frequently teaches; and the importance of Miller's generosity as facilitator and his faith in the capacity for each group he works with to tell powerful, beautiful stories that need to be told.

The first three are applicable to Miller's performing *and* teaching careers, and are supported by Miller's writing and the interviews conducted for this study. The latter two threads are more specific to Miller's teaching career, and come from my own observations and the commentary of interview subjects. The body as memoir, the performance of self, and Miller as facilitator are best explored in context of the progression of movement exercises and performance creation prompts Miller relies on in the rehearsal hall; these are documented in Chapter 2. The immediacy and minimalism of the work Miller facilitates, as well as the curricular connections at play within specific workshop contexts are explored within the case studies that follow (Chapters 3-5).

Body as Memoir

As a performer, Miller frequently connects stories from his childhood and adolescence with the urgent concerns of his present life, and weaves them together into a hope for transformation in the future. As a teacher, many of the prompts he uses connect his workshop participants to memories of their own childhood and adolescence, particularly moments of individuation. He asks them to recall moments when they said, "No," or spoke truth in difficult circumstances. These memories are juxtaposed with what is most on the participants' minds. The past memories and present concerns are framed in context of how they live in our bodies. Miller's 1998 essay "Embodied Pedagogy" (the origin of this study's title), opens with:

Much of my work as a teacher and a performer is an exploration of the body as a site of memory, self and creativity. I am particularly drawn to a discourse of the body as the primary battleground on which our identities are marked by race, gender, ability, age, sexual orientation, class, and the commodity of "looks." [. . .]

The basis of my pedagogy is the exploration of our embodied experience as a prime avenue for learning, narrative and transformation. (*Beds* 141)

Miller's body mapping exercise assumes these stories and memories live with the body. "If you listen carefully, your lips remember their first kiss and their first loss, your body remembers the places of hurt and the places of pleasure. As a teacher of performance this is something I encourage my students to do" (Miller, *Body Blows* 80). How do our bodies connect us to our parents, siblings, ancestors? How does our lived experience mark our bodies in unique ways? "What is the story of your elbow? What happened to make that scar? The story of your teeth? The story of your genitals? [. . .] Where are your jagged places? These might be the places where we can let some light in" (Miller, *Beds* 147). By identifying and conversing with the ways our bodies are marked by our families and our histories, we "start to see the way to escape a culture of sameness that wants our bodies to be tamed of their uniqueness" (Miller, *Beds* 162).

Miller is also a writer. As previously noted, he has maintained a journal since the age of ten, and uses the writing of memoir as a "fierce act of imagining the future" (Miller, *Beds* 8). In his workshops, however, the participants create with their voices and bodies; the writing only comes at the end of the workshop. "It's good to have a period where paper isn't coming into it. Instead we can focus on the breath and body and presence and the moment," and compose the pieces in "breath meter" (Miller, *Beds* 254-5).

Performance of Self

The uniqueness of our marked bodies and the stories that reside within them is one way of locating and embracing the "incredible specificity" Miller has prized since discovering the

autobiographical work of Spalding Gray (Miller, *Beds* 61). Embracing this specificity, the elements of our lives that mark us as unique and unusual, is a “useful and simple tool to create public identity in a society that is trying to bland everyone out and make everyone seem the same” (Miller, *Beds* 70). Miller is fond of using the Island of Misfit Toys (from the 1964 animated film *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*) as metaphor for those on the fringes who may not feel entirely comfortable in mainstream society, for a variety of reasons. “I have a fondness for the island of misfit toys because I am one. But most of us are, in one way or another. Including the tallest, whitest, most handsome, muscular straight man in the room” (Miller 2012 interview).

As a performer, Miller has found the act of acknowledging and “speaking my narratives of my life as a gay person around the emotional, sexual, political topographies that I’ve explored has deepened my sense of who I am, deepened my social relations, transformed aspects of American political life [. . .]” (Miller, *Beds* 261). This idea, that claiming individual voice and self is a powerful act of self-knowledge that strengthens relationships and has political implications, is one of the primary philosophies assumed within Miller’s teaching work. “[T]he act of telling is an act that imagines you have some kind of agency or power, because it means there’s something worth telling, and also that it’s worth listening to” (Miller, *Beds* 260).

For Miller, the connection between past and future is crystallized in the performance of self and personal narrative. From his earliest adolescent journal entries, Miller has found the act of writing about his life a powerful force for not just understanding the past and present, but transforming the future:

I have always used the memories of things passed [sic] to rewrite the ending of what is to come. I have done this from that first moment that I picked up my spiral binder at the edge of ten and somehow knew that the queer boy star of my story was not going to end up hanging by his neck from a beam in our family's detached suburban garage. I write these stories of who I have been to imagine who I might become. Writing memoir is a fierce act of imagining the future. (Miller, *Beds* 8)

Miller has found that the students he works with are able to invest powerfully “when they are performing identity – which is mostly what I do – but [also] their material, their urgency, what they bring from their lives [. . .] which is so powerful” (qtd. in Coleman et al.).

Immediacy and Minimalism

“The whole reason for being an artist in this particular performance realm,” Miller writes in *1001 Beds*, is “to respond quickly, effectively, and surgically to what you want to do. [. . .] My first impulse with performance, the reason I liked it, was because it was quick. It’s still the reason I like it. You just do it” (87). This idea of timeliness or urgency is echoed consistently in Miller’s own comments about both his performance and teaching work. In a conference panel on devised theatre in university performance seasons, Miller praised the way creating work from scratch with students allows them “to address a crisis, something that’s going on right then, not two years later after play development, after going to Sundance. But while it’s still happening. [. . .] That is what we should be able to do, we should be able to make theatre of now, theatre of what’s happening right now” (qtd. in Coleman et al.).

Miller's phrasing above ("theatre of now") is indicative of his tendency to rely on language rooted in time to describe the urgency of his own work. Miller's solo shows tour; while he regularly adjust his scripts and leaves room for a certain level of improvisation, they are consistent in their primary concerns and structure from location to location around the country. Miller's teaching work, however, allows for the influence of place. In a teaching residency, Miller can direct workshop participants to investigate not just what is on the front burner of their lives *now*, but also *here*. I have chosen the word "immediacy" to encompass Miller's ability to create and facilitate work that responds in an immediate way to the circumstances (of both time and place) that inspire it.

Immediacy can manifest as a connection to a performer's personal life, or to larger societal contexts. *Litmus* at CU-Boulder was initially conceived as an opportunity for students in a swing state to engage with the looming 2012 presidential election. Tony Dostert, a student at CU-Boulder who performed in *Litmus*, was "excited" about Miller's "ideas as far as what we were doing in the class and how it related to stuff outside the class, how it related to stuff in society, in the media, current events. It really opened my eyes to how theatre as a whole is created in response to life that's going around us" (Dostert).

This immediacy is best served by a minimal style of performance. Miller writes of the economic and aesthetic influences on his minimalism:

Though I usually have only one or two props, this is not just me wanting to create "poor" theater in a Grotowskian sense. Sure, some of it is determined by my lean-and-mean budget constraints [but] the truth is I prefer to allow the quicksilver imagination of the audience to work with me and make things appear

and disappear with the minimum of fuss, muss, and shipping fees. [. . .] My stage space needs to be blank enough so it can serve as a surface on which the audience and I can imagine new social relations. (xix-xx)

This minimal, “empty space” style allows Miller (and the workshop participants he works with) to “stay true to my crazy notion that I should always write about what is most truly on the front burner in my life” (Miller, *Beds* 4).

Curriculum Connections

The frequency of Miller’s workshops within institutions of higher learning presents an opportunity to examine the curricular interests of these universities and colleges in Miller’s teaching work. It is tempting to address these workshops specifically as a method of actor or performer training, and many actors who participate in Miller’s workshops report feeling their acting work is improved as a result. However, this is not a primary goal of his teaching methodology. From a curricular standpoint, Miller is more interested in the entrepreneurial impacts of his pedagogy; students become better (and more confident) creators, directors, and producers as much as they learn to be better actors.

This is particularly true when devised work (such as Miller’s) goes beyond a brief residency and is incorporated into a department’s production season. A 2014 Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) conference panel titled “Inviting Devised Work to the Table: Including Devised Work in a Department’s Production Season” (chaired by Bud Coleman, Theatre & Dance Department chair at the University of Colorado Boulder), was convened specifically to address the benefits and challenges of this kind of inclusion. Devised work has made inroads toward mainstream acceptance within university programs in recent years;

however, resistance to, or doubts regarding the legitimacy of devised work remain within many institutions. Panelists included faculty members from several institutions where Miller has worked in more extended residencies, as well as Miller himself and fellow NEA Four performance artist (and teacher) Holly Hughes. While many of the examples from the panel focused on Miller's teaching and devising work specifically, the purpose of the panel was to discuss the value and use of devised work generally.

Two main topics of discussion for this panel relevant to this dissertation are the legitimacy lent to devised work by including it in a department's main season and the value of teaching students entrepreneurial skills in creating and producing their own work. Edward Kahn (Ohio Wesleyan) noted that when students graduate, they will have no faculty advisor, no scene shop support, and likely no budget when they try to create work in the outside world. Miller agreed: "They're going to learn these skills about how to do it with nothing." He continues:

I think at this point for our universities and colleges to graduate theatre students without depthful knowledge of devised process means you're graduating artists totally unequipped for the world they're going to live in. [. . .] It's incumbent on us, actually, to make sure we graduate students who know how to do this. That they can go with nothing, no budget, no costume department, no electrician.
(qtd. in Coleman et al.)

Miller connected the importance of producing this kind of work on main stages, or as part of the season, directly with the entrepreneurial skills students learn as well:

First of all it communicates to the students that this is not fringe, weird activity.

This is central practice to being a theatre artist, artist citizen. I also like including that this is crucial entrepreneurship. This is the way to make sure you just might, maybe, have the ability to do work in your life, in the future. That you know that you can be challenged to go into a social service setting, or a school, prison, something, to go in and create work. Which I think is really purposeful and useful. (qtd. in Coleman et al.)

By approaching season productions as opportunities to supplement existing course curriculum, departments can be more flexible in engaging new forms and processes of making theatre. Miller: "I know changing curriculum is very, very difficult, almost impossible. Sometimes with productions, you can actually start to build new kinds of curriculum through the rehearsal process, which is really useful" (qtd. in Coleman et al.).

Residencies in which the performance Miller and the participants create is included in the season, however, are the exception, not the rule. One week residencies with a final showing are far more common, though Miller has ongoing relationships with a handful of schools who invite him to their campuses on a regular basis. One such program is Southern Methodist University, where Miller has been an annual guest since 1999. His visit is coordinated with a course titled "Studies in Contemporary Performance: Solo Performance," during which the students create and perform eight-twelve minute solo pieces.

Importance of Facilitator

One of the more difficult elements to quantify is Miller's presence as facilitator. However, a study of his techniques would be incomplete without some effort to explore his

presence in the room, generosity, and faith in the participants' ability and need to tell their own stories with grace, urgency, and power.

I think the tone I bring is good, and my 100% faith in their ability to do it, and that their humanity and their artistry is manifest in the room. Which is probably the most tangible faith I have, I think. I literally never, for a moment, question a group. And I think that communicates to people – “oh, wow, he really thinks we can do this.” There's literally never been one that's been absent of just super-charged beauty and revelation. [. . .] The wealth of material that comes up is just so incredible. I feel very lucky. (Miller, 2012 interview)

Miller's generosity and faith in each ensemble was commented on by several workshop participants that I interviewed. *DocumentNation's* Zach Sudbury told me, “I think that belief in whoever you're working with has always been important to me, but I've never experienced it like Tim Miller does it. And he gets such wonderful things from people with all kinds of experience, you know? So that really solidified my belief in that as a teaching model, too” (Sudbury). Ron Zank: “he's so generous with himself and his time” (Zank). Jodi Jinks: “If anything, I took away this idea of how I felt as a performer. I felt . . . *held*. [. . .] I aspire now to do that [for my students]. To really be present. It takes so much energy, and [Tim] gave it everything. He gave us everything” (Jinks).

Tammy Menghini, faculty liaison for Miller's residency at the University of Colorado Boulder, described Miller's work with the undergraduates at CU as “brave work,” and credits Miller with creating a space where that bravery is possible.

It's really brave that they have an opportunity to say the things and do the things and move in the ways that they aren't allowed to in – I call it the pedestrian world. So he really sets up this environment for the ensemble to trust each other and to try things out and to share stories and share moments in their lives that they might not get a chance to do otherwise. In both instances when I worked with him, there have been situations where things open up in the student's life that are really rather emotional and moving, and at times rather horrifying. But he's so good at setting up, first and foremost, the ensemble. That it's a level playing field. In *Litmus*, we had a lot of students in there that really had very little stage experience. But that's the glory of his work, right? You don't have to be an actor. You just have to be a human. It's so much about just sharing your humanity. Ultimately the company does that with each other, then they have to be brave enough to do it with the audience. He does that really well. And he always does it with a sense of heart and humor. (Meneghini)

Rhonda Blair, who teaches the solo performance course at SMU: "Tim brings such a fierce love with him into the room, which has been really, really important to so many of the students who have taken the workshop. He models so many great things for them in terms of how to get work done, how to be present to each other, and how to listen. Just how to listen" (Blair Interview).

John Kaufmann created several devised pieces in his career before participating in *DocumentNation* with Miller in 2012. He found the process of working with Miller to be a balance between trusting the process and trusting Miller as facilitator:

Prompts and a deadline, I think, are the A + B = devised show. And maybe in with prompts would be ground rules, what are the rules of the event or experience? And seeing how often with prompts, ground rules, and a deadline, something watchable happens. As a group, “Oh my gosh, we’ve got this much time!” But in the back of my mind, thinking – not confidently, but trying to reassure myself – something always happens. I don’t want to put it down, because I think it’s great. It was a simple thing, breaking up into small groups and you go off and work on this, share, and having something come out of it that was delightful to be in. And Tim’s gentle guidance and his spirit informed that, so it’s not as simple as any moron can say, “Okay, divide into groups, here’s your prompt.” There is an X factor of the spirit that a person brings in, and that director as facilitator coming in strong. Maybe a lot of that job is looking people in the eye and saying, “This is going to be okay,” even though nobody knows, but to have that person who seems to know what’s going on saying, “It’s going to be okay,” as Tim did, is comforting. It lets us off the hook. (Kaufmann)

SMU student “Harper”¹: “He was so good at talking to us and pulling things from us and making us feel comfortable in that space to talk about some things that I probably wouldn’t . . . some things came up in that workshop that I don’t think I’ve talked about with many other people” (“Harper”).

¹ Pseudonym used at the request of SMU’s Department of Research Administration. See Chapter 5.

Need for Study

Thus far the lion's share of research done on Tim Miller has focused on his performance work and on his role in the NEA Four Supreme Court case. Without discounting the significance or impact of Miller's performance work, there is a gap in the coverage of his creative work where pedagogy should be. Given the sheer quantity of individuals (of many interests and backgrounds, not just actors and students) who have taken the opportunity to work with Miller in these workshop situations, there is a significant need to document these workshops and demonstrate the importance of Miller's educational contributions to American culture and performance. This belief was expressed unprompted by several interview subjects, perhaps most eloquently by Bill Doan, Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) President at the time of *DocumentNation* (2012):

Tim is a brilliant teacher, one of the most generous spirits, souls, I've ever met. His impact over time – the sheer number of workshops he does every year at universities all over the country, the repeats he does at places like SMU, and here [Penn State], and other places. His impact on our consciousness, our performance consciousness – and not just on the work he's done in terms of civil rights and gay activism . . . even aesthetically, his notion of telling your own story, the work he's done on masculinity. His impact is . . . is . . . wide and deep. Tim's impact on theatre education, theatre training, on our consciousness, is I think more significant than anyone has been able to measure yet. (Doan)

Literature Review

Aside from *1001 Beds*, scholarly considerations of Miller as an educator are few and far between. Katy Ryan's "A Body's Mind Experience in Tim Miller's Workshop" is a brief exploration of her experience in a Tim Miller workshop at the 1996 "Performance Art, Culture, and Pedagogy" symposium at Penn State. Dana Sayre's MA Thesis "Queer Utopian Performance at Texas A&M University," is primarily interested in theorizing a Tim Miller workshop at Texas A&M University in October 2010 in the context of Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance* and José Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*. None deal explicitly with Miller's pedagogy.

Methodology

My primary goal with this dissertation is historical, and this study relies heavily on oral history interviews with faculty, students, and others who have experience Miller's workshops. Jaber Gubrium et. al.'s *Sage Handbook of Interview Research* (2012) and Robert Williams's *The Historian's Toolbox* (2003) have been helpful guides for methods and standards of collecting interview research.

Since embarking on this study in 2012, I have conducted thirty-seven interviews (with IRB approval), including two with Tim Miller (2012 and 2015) regarding four residencies/case studies: a week long workshop residency at the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2008; a three day workshop as part of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) annual conference in summer 2012; a month long residency at the University of Colorado Boulder in October 2012; and a weekend workshop on campus at Southern Methodist University in 2014. Additionally, I recorded and transcribed two conference panels related to Miller's teaching career. These interviews and panels totaled twenty-four hours and forty-five minutes of audio,

transcribed to 192,968 words of commentary. (The interviews with University of Missouri workshop participants took place approximately six years after the fact. As a result, many of the participants' memories were vague and the material generated was insufficient to create a full picture of that residency; I opted to exclude it from this study.)

The CU-Boulder project, *Litmus*, occurred while I was a Graduate Part Time Instructor teaching "Introduction to Theatre," in which my eighty-five enrolled students attended *Litmus* and submitted essays responding to that performance. These student papers have been anonymized and are also used (with IRB approval) in my discussion of *Litmus*.²

When conducting interviews with workshop participants, I started with a semi-formalized list of questions, but found as I continued to conduct interviews that many of the subjects followed the same path without a lot of prompting from me. For the most part, the interviews with workshop participants can be divided into three parts: What was your knowledge/experience base before this project?; What do you remember of the process and performance and how you experienced it at the time?; How do you contextualize your experience working with Miller in hindsight?

Several of the participants I interviewed re-enacted the moments from the performances they were describing. John Kaufmann, who performed in *DocumentNation* (see Chapter 3) sang his "vo do de o" song for me, and had to stand up when describing a

² On the advice of Claire Dunne, CU's IRB Program Director, I made a verbal announcement to my class offering them the chance to opt out if they were uncomfortable having their work used. I received no such requests.

particularly movement-heavy moment of the performance. Karen Dabney, who performed and served as assistant director of *Litmus* at the University of Colorado Boulder (see Chapter 4), stood and recited her “Kansas rap” when she struggled to describe it. CU-Boulder student Daniel Leonard started doing pushup gestures, even though he was seated at a table, when describing a fellow *Litmus* performer’s piece that involved pushups. “Harper” continually touched her neck as we spoke about a piece she performed about her neck as a site of vulnerability.

Note on Transcription

In the process of transcribing these interviews from audio to text, I have attempted to re-create the vocal emphases and delivery of the participants as closely as possible.

Punctuation is intended to convey vocal rhythms more than grammar, though I have made some adjustments to improve readability in print form.

. . . indicates the speaker paused briefly

– indicates the speaker changed subject or shifted direction

[. . .] indicates an omission or cut on my part

I have also used italics to indicate spoken emphasis: unless otherwise indicated, italics within an interview quotation reference verbal emphasis on the part of the speaker. Emphasis in quotes from print sources are clarified as mine or in the original.

Before traveling to Dallas, Texas, to observe Miller’s 2014 visit to the Theatre division at SMU’s Meadows School of the Arts, I consulted with their Research Compliance Office, who requested any student participants or interview subjects be referred to by pseudonym. All

other interview subjects were offered use of a pseudonym: all opted to use their own names, and are quoted and cited as such.

Chapter Summaries

This study is comprised of three case studies, arranged chronologically, each of which constitutes an opportunity to investigate variations on Miller's workshop processes.

Chapter 2 serves as workshop exercise glossary, introducing and describing the most commonly recurring workshop exercises in Miller's repertoire. I have included Miller's descriptions of the exercises (where available), my own recollections, and commentary from workshop participants to explore the intent and the mechanics of Miller's workshop facilitation process.

Chapter 3 details *DocumentNation*, a performance workshop Miller conducted as part of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE)'s annual conference in August 2012. The performance took place on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The specificity of place and the connection to the conference theme (Performance as/is Civic Engagement: Advocate, Collaborate, Educate) mark this particular performance as a significant variation from the workshops in university classrooms and theatres, while retaining its educational focus, as the participants were university professors and graduate students.

Chapter 4 documents the development and performance of *Litmus* at the University of Colorado Boulder in October 2012. While this process followed roughly the same trajectory as a weeklong workshop, the schedule was significantly expanded, with several weeks of rehearsal time instead of several days. *Litmus* was produced as a ticketed event within the department's academic theatre season. This chapter explores the ways the length of this project challenged

the immediacy Miller prizes, and how its placement in the department's production season affected Miller's usual minimalism. Additionally, this case study engages with the project's relationship (as a season production) to department curriculum, including its treatment within an "Introduction to Theatre" course, whose students attended and wrote response to the performance. These student response papers provide a useful, if limited, opportunity to gauge (student) audience reaction.

Chapter 5 explores Miller's role as a recurring guest artist at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Miller's relationship with this theatre program spans over fifteen years as an annual guest artist. Miller's weekend workshop is intended as a supplement to Dr. Rhonda Blair's "Studies in Contemporary Performance: Solo Performance" class. This chapter documents Miller's 2014 visit to SMU and investigates the relationship between Miller's pedagogy and this solo performance course.

Chapter 6 concludes this study by highlighting key points, such as how each of the six points of analysis identified earlier in this chapter play out in the workshop exercises, their structure and progression, and how they are stretched and varied within each case study. Chapter 6 also offers suggestions for further or related research into the theoretical implications of Miller's pedagogy, explores the potential for controversy to emerge in the course of his performance creation workshops, and opens the door to additional contexts (devised theatre practice and the role of visiting teaching artists in institutions of higher education, for example) in which Miller's teaching work can be considered.

Chapter 2

Glossary of Workshop Exercises

As noted in Chapter 1, Miller's work as both a teacher *and* performer explores "the body as a site of memory, self and creativity" and "our embodied experience as a prime avenue for learning, narrative and transformation" (*Beds* 141). As a performer, Miller found his own embodied experience a rich source of material for creating his own solo work, and has transferred many of those prompts, strategies and philosophies into his teaching work. "In the work I do with groups of artists and non-artists," Miller writes, "I have learned that finding a way to be more present in our bodies and open to the narratives that we carry in our flesh and blood is the quickest route to discovering the revelatory material about what it means to be human" (*Beds* 171).

In context of the framing elements outlined in Chapter 1, my analysis of the workshop progression and individual exercises that comprise this chapter will primarily focus on the ways these exercises guide the workshop participants toward (1) delving into their own marked bodies as memoir of their lived and inherited experience, (2) their recognition and performance of the specificity of their own experience, and (3) what stories in their memories and bodies most need to be told and performed in the *here* and the *now*. In this chapter, I will break down the workshop exercises Miller uses most often into their component parts in order to examine how that exploration takes place. It is structured on Miller's model for a one-week residency (which Miller is hired to teach most frequently). Miller described the one-week model to me in a 2012 interview as a:

crazy process, which I'm good at. I know how to have five rehearsals and have something, either on the fifth day or the sixth day. You know, either five rehearsals and a performance the next day, or four and a half rehearsals and a performance that night. That is just so fast, and to me there's just such clear things that need to happen each day. [. . .] It's a very effective week, and things really happen.

Despite the variation in length of process among the case studies included in the following chapters, the structure and exercises outlined below remain fairly consistent; the process is expanded or compressed based on the timeline of the workshop. New exercises are developed in longer workshop scenarios and some of the exercises below are excluded in shorter workshops. It should be noted that these descriptions are often cobbled together from Miller's recollections at different points in his life, memories of workshop participants (including my own), which are often incomplete or colored by time. They are intended to be descriptive, to offer the reader an approximation of the experience of Miller's process. They are not intended to be exhaustive or to function as instruction manuals.

Day 1: Holding Hands, Flash Performances, and Truth Speaking

On the first day of a new workshop, Miller will

gather the group, sense who's there, hear from everyone. I always bring people together, lots of physical contact, as you know. Lots of hand holding, making the circle. The idea that everyone says something, that you hear from people – which again, also gently disrespects boundaries – that not just the loudmouths are talking. So that starts to give people the agency to think, okay, my body's in

it, my voice is in it, I'm actually imagining my life matters, and then diving in to playfully do those little flash performances: the faking orgasm. But that workshop's very set for me, because it just never doesn't stir the soup in a really good way. (Miller, 2012 interview)

Miller wrote a detailed description of his approach to the first day of a workshop with a new group of people in *1001 Beds*. He assumes everyone walking in the door is "wounded and scared and tempted to bolt for the door. This includes me," so he greets them at the door, asks their names. When everyone has arrived, Miller gathers the group into a circle, asks them to hold hands and close their eyes, and asks them to notice their thoughts and feelings, let their breath come in and out, and "allow the mind and heart to quiet." When they open their eyes, the participants walk around the space, noticing details they might gloss over under normal circumstances, such as light and shadow, flooring, the paint on walls, and the other people in the workshop, "as if they have never seen a human body before." The group settles onto the floor to warm up their bodies and their imaginations; "as they gently hold one knee to their heart," Miller asks them to think of "one thing from their lives that they would like to get rid of," then write the word for it in the air with their big toe. In all the workshops Miller has taught, he finds fear to be the thing that at least half of his participants want to eject from their lives. On their next exhale, they "disperse that word to the four corners of the earth so that all that is left is the creative and integrated part of that fear of judgment." When stretching the opposite leg, Miller asks the group to invite "the thing that they would desire in greater abundance to surround their living and their creative work," to write it in big letters in the sky above their heads, and shout it out to the room as a group. "What a beautiful sound that

makes! [. . .] We know our fears and call forward our strengths. Everything else comes from this” (143-4).

A substantial number of participants that I interviewed commented on the amount of time they spent holding hands with the other participants. The nature of these responses varied; some loved the process (Karen Gygli: “[it] put everyone at ease” [Gygli]), while others expressed initial frustration (Bernadette Sefic: “I don’t want to hold your hand anymore!” [Sefic]). The quantity of response indicates that there is some significance to the seemingly simple act of holding hands with fellow performers. Miller elaborated on the reasons behind it:

And obviously, as every kindergarten teacher knows, hand holding is sweet, and it also give you structure, and it also claims a lot of authority. Holding hands in a circle means no one’s texting. You’re gently – very gently beginning to appropriately disrespect physical boundaries. In an acting class, or a theatre class, movement class, to be in physical contact is not strange at all. It would be strange if you weren’t. But sometimes we’re holding hands for a good ten minutes, or fifteen minutes. [. . .] I think all kinds of things start passing between the group. Whose hand in the group is regularly held? Whose hand is almost never held? Who has a hand-holding beloved in their life? And suddenly then there’s this . . . and I wouldn’t exaggerate the democratic, Whitmanic vista of a circle of people holding hands, but I also wouldn’t underestimate it. It’s something powerful, and almost everybody is in some kind of touch deprivation. If you’re getting certain kinds of touch, it may not be exactly the touch that you want, or it’s not exactly the touch from who you want, or whatever. Because

we're in each other's physical space so much, the introduction and negotiation of how we touch each other, with all the multiple meanings of touching, physical touch, metaphorical, just being suddenly exposed by the clarity of someone's memory of their hurt, or hope. (2012 interview)

After the initial warmups, one of the first exercises Miller uses with a group are "flash performances," which are combinations of actions and spoken text over a specified period of time. Miller will ask everyone to take one step forward with their left foot, and to take fourteen seconds to complete that step. Run from one side of the room to the other, imagining that the thing you fear most is chasing you, looking over your shoulder occasionally to locate how close it is. Snowboard through the room while singing an operatic aria composed of Italian food names for twenty-two seconds. Walk through the room, at various speeds, changing direction often, while narrating everything you have eaten in the past twenty-four hours. After a few combinations, Miller will often ask for suggestions from the participants. In *DocumentNation*, we created a flash performance involving boxing and waltzing while reciting the Pledge of Allegiance that was included in the final performance on the National Mall. At SMU, we washed dishes, vomited, and dodged machine gun fire while reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Miller is fond of cultural texts that are easily accessed from memory; I have also seen him ask a group to choose their favorite soliloquy from *Hamlet* as their text. The flash performances usually end with Miller asking the group to walk as if barefoot across broken glass while faking orgasm. This flash performance is generally repeated; the group is split in half, and one half walks shoulder-to-shoulder across the room repeating the exercise together for the benefit of the second half, who follow suit.

Faking orgasm in a group of friends or strangers is one of the most memorable flash performances. Miller commented that

It actually really disrespects boundaries. [. . .] and you can certainly imagine that's too much the first meeting, or the first day. But also I don't have that much time. [. . .] It's goofy and it's super energized and funny. And it immediately advances us into, oh, okay, so . . . sex. Our bodies' pleasure, our bodies' anxiety. It really brings that forward super fast – in twenty seconds – in a really fun way. (2012 interview)

Katy Ryan describes her experience with these exercises in her 1997 *Theatre Topics* essay, "A Body's Mind Experience in Tim Miller's Workshop":

[F]or fifteen seconds, we were to walk in a large circle, scratching our pubic hairs, and listing what we had for breakfast. Go!

A swarm of bodies began to move around me; a buzz of voices erupted. I had the distinct feeling that I had been flung into water without taking a breath. A woman with maroon hair confidently thrust her fist down into her jeans and started yelling, "Cigarettes, cereal, coffee, another cigarette, coffee." A fifty-something man casually unzipped his pants, fumbled into his white underwear, and began scratching as he quietly catalogued, "Cantaloupe, banana, orange juice . . ."

Trapped in this murmuring bodily force, I was vaguely aware of my right hand scratching, through clothing to be sure, some region of my body closer to my belly button than my crotch; I heard myself mumbling, "Coffee, um, coffee . .

." Actually, I had not had coffee that morning; I had no idea what I had had, so I was simply repeating whatever I heard from a passing voice. At some point, I echoed "bacon"--I've been a vegetarian for the past decade. About a dozen seconds into the chaos, I became aware of my other hand: it was furiously scratching behind my left ear. What was it doing *that* for? I had been so focused on my right hand not scratching where it was supposed to be scratching that I was quite oblivious to my left hand. There, in a crowd of strangers, with no one paying any attention to me--but me--my body underwent some kind of bizarre physical schizophrenia. As I stared in bewilderment at my traumatized left hand, Tim happily screamed, "Great! That's enough." (Ryan 205-6, emphasis in original)

Zach Sudbury, who performed in *DocumentNation*, found the flash performances the most memorable part of the early rehearsal process,

specifically the exercise of doing three things all at once. Like itching all over your body, and directing traffic, and singing "The Star-Spangled Banner," or something. But three things to get you moving in a different way and doing so many things that you can't think, so you're just kind of doing it. And then moving across the room as a kind of wall of orgasm. [burst of laughter] That's a recurring thing, it seems like. [. . .] And like the discomfort with it, but then . . . well, everybody else is doing it, so we'll just do it. And . . . and . . . kind of getting very inside myself -- I'm just going to pretend nobody else is here and just do it. But then not being able to ignore it and kind of getting pulled out of just yourself into the whole experience. (Sudbury)

For the next section of the workshop, Miller leads the group through a guided meditation helping them identify a memory of a moment when they spoke truth to power, said “No” in a powerful way, or otherwise claimed their identity and authority.

[We] locate a large personal narrative about truth speaking, transformation, authority confronting. Whatever I’m throwing in, always those three, giant existential, clouds parting, personal authority claiming, which is drenched in my own agendas that this work is really about emboldening and allowing us to acknowledge that we’ve had moments as children, as adults, as adolescents where we knew what was right and behaved accordingly. We let our body have its truth, or we let ourselves speak up even though we were afraid. (Miller 2012 interview)

The group is asked to stand in a clump, or a small circle, and for forty-five seconds slowly lower themselves to the ground while telling the story of somebody they knew who has died. The group remains on the floor for a few minutes, maintaining three points of contact with somebody else's leg, arm, hair, fingers. Miller asks the group to think of what they love about being alive, and to call these things out as they rise back to a standing position.

The group separates, and Miller asks them to close their eyes and find a moment in their childhood or adolescence when they said, “No” to someone, probably in a position of authority. Or a time they said, “Yes,” when that perhaps scared them. He then asks the group to imagine what color that moment is, and to call out the color. What did it taste like? The group sticks out their tongues to lick the air, and calls out the taste of that moment. Once the moment has been

identified, and the sensory experience explored, each participant is asked to create a physical gesture that expresses that moment.

At this point, the group sits in a large circle, and each person, one at a time, steps into the circle and performs their gesture for the group. There is no text, no explanation, just this one gesture, often performed twice to include the full circle, not just one side. After each gesture is performed, Miller divides the participants into groups of three or four. Each participant composes roughly seven lines of text to express that moment, and directs their partners to physically assist them in telling the story. Miller allows approximately five minutes for the groups to compose their sentences and direct each other, and cautions them not to over-explain their piece to their partners.

Alex Reed describes the process of creating a short piece in a one day mini-workshop Miller conducted at CU-Boulder in March 2012. He asked one member of his group

to hover around me and say out loud the things a seventeen-year-old boy would be worried about. And she ended up saying “Hackey sacks! Inappropriate erections!” and things like that. And I said [to Amber, a third person in my group], “I’m going to come up to you and say something really shocking, and you just have to act shocked.” And that was all the direction I gave to my group members. (Reed)

The piece Reed performed was about the morning he announced to his family that he was no longer Christian and would not be attending church that day. Andryn Arithson, who participated in the same one-day workshop, developed a short piece about falling in love with

her transgender partner. (See Chapter 4 for more detailed descriptions of both Reed's and Arithson's pieces.) She described the process:

You come up with a movement associated with a memory, and then building on that, what does that memory smell like? What does that memory taste like? What is the color of that memory? Bringing all of these senses together and creating a theatrical collage of memory. That's a big part of what I got out of Tim's work. Digging for our memories, and telling stories as richly as possible and thinking about them in dynamic ways and applying your creative senses to that story. [. . .] And I think I talked about how it felt like boysenberry syrup [laughs]. It tasted like boysenberry syrup. It was all the sweet without the sticky, because my partner hates it when you get sticky. [. . .] We broke up into groups, and we had five minutes to all come up with your sentences, direct everybody, and try to have a transition that makes sense, and come back and then we'll all show our work to each other. That's kind of the formula of how most of the work ended up being created. Here's a prompt, go make something out of it, and we'll bring it back and see what comes out of it. (Arithson)

Day 2: Body Maps

On the second day Miller usually focuses on body mapping, "which really pulls our poetics more forward, and really moist and sticky parts of ourselves and our family DNA, and really specific scars and bone breakings and loves. And that exercise of doing that mapping the body is really core for people" (Miller, 2012 interview).

Leading into the exercise, Miller engages in a series of improvisational movement exercises. The group moves around the room, walking or running at different speeds and becoming aware of the others in the room; not just avoiding collisions, but noticing the ways the other people move in the space. If someone else's movement pattern inspires you, you imitate or adopt it as you move past them. These brief movement conversations circulate throughout the room as one imitation generates another, and another. Miller writes that he "develop[s] this into a circle dance, where two people continue this movement conversation while we surround them and let their dance lead the rest of us around the circle. A new person goes into the middle. The duet is new and the dance has changed" (*Beds* 145). Once each person in the room has passed through the "duet" in the center of the circle, Miller asks the group to call out

a phrase or a word of a feeling or thought they had as they took part in the circle dance. *Crazy animal play. Sex. Fingers talking. Competitive. I felt nervous. Self-conscious.* In just a few moments, this almost poetic response takes the temperature of the group. This is an efficient way to tune in to what is going on inside the group without stopping the energy of the work and clumping down into a gab-fest. It is crucial to find ways for us to talk about what is going on in the work, without always diving into the brainy self that detaches from our bodily experience. (Miller, *Beds* 145-6, italics in original)

When I participated in this exercise at SMU, many of the descriptors called out by the group were animal comparisons ("crazy ape-like," "sexy monkeys"), which Miller noted was not uncommon for this exercise. Others commented on the intense connection they felt to a fellow

performer in the midst of a mimicking movement conversation. These words and phrases lead naturally into a group brainstorm of the ways we use metaphors to describe (and often demean) our bodies and our selves; butterflies in our stomachs, silver tongues, bats in the belfry, a frog in the throat, cat got our tongues, pigeon toes, thunder thighs, and many more. Miller writes of this exercise, “Our daily language is full of expressions like *He has feet of clay. I was caught red handed. He broke my heart. My head is in the clouds.* I believe that each of those things has probably happened to the [people] I work with” (*Beds* 160, italics in original).

Miller distributes oversized sheets of blank paper to the group, and they spread out across the room with markers, crayons, pens, and pencils to draw maps of their bodies, making use of whatever metaphors help them visualize the “story that really *needs* to be told, [the] story so important that if it doesn’t get told you might burst” (Miller, *Beds* 149). As the group spends fifteen or twenty minutes drawing these maps, Miller talks them through the possibilities. He asks them to think about family: Who are the people that came before? What is your body’s relationship to ancestry? Are there places on your body where these family relationships, emotions, scars happen to live?

I want you to allow yourself to see the metaphors of your body as fully as possible. [. . .] As you open to your story, really let those associations leap forward. What might you have lost when your crooked teeth were braced and straightened, even though you now have a movie star smile? Where are your jagged places? These might be the places where we can let some light in. I want you to see what kind of transformations this story brought you. As you tell this story, really find what is the legacy of this place on your body, it might be either

a positive or negative legacy. The straightened teeth may have taken away a part of a jagged tooth song that your wild aunt in Kentucky still sings. The violation of your body may now give you the power to transform shit into gold. The baseball that hit you in the head might have knocked you into your artist self. The metaphors of our body may well be the keys to understanding ourselves in a deep way. They might be powerful ways of knowing ourselves. Really find that metaphor and that story of transformation that comes from this place on your body. (Miller, *Beds* 147-8)

Miller offers examples of the kinds of images and metaphors generated from body mapping in “Suck, Spit, Chew, Swallow,” which documents the Birmingham, England, workshop he conducted in 1999: “The drawings explode into images of men with locks over their hearts, with wings sprouting from their backs, with hooks holding their flesh in equilibrium, with feet balancing precariously on a house of cards” (Miller, *Beds* 158). Not all body maps are image-based, however. “James,” an SMU student, used words rather than images to create his body map:

I am not a good artist. Or at least I don't . . . my way of communicating is typically not through the drawing of images, so at first that exercise really actually scared me the most out of all of them. . . . Maybe I cheated my way, but it was also my interpretation, so . . . I drew my body, but using words. So my legs just said something like, “These are made of air and wood.” And then my eyes said, “these are the memory makers,” instead of drawing anything. What I learned from that exercise is that I didn't have to draw. But I also didn't have to

write structured words. I could come up with my own structure, put it on paper, trust that it would make sense, and still get something out of it and fulfill the exercise. So it kind of relieved the academic part of my brain from working, which was really helpful for the rest of the workshop. ("James")



Fig. 1. The body map created at SMU by "James." Photo by Heidi Schmidt.

After the group has created their maps, Miller invites them to shift their spatial relationship to their maps; stand over them, walk around to the other side to view the map upside down. Does it resonate differently from five feet away instead of five inches? Miller asks them "to let those image associations leap forward, uncensored by the practical mind. I want them to discover what kind of transformations the telling of this story might offer them. I want them to really find the legacy of this place on their body that has a story that needs to be told."

Miller then gives the group “the challenge of finding a physical action that expresses this story and then, one at a time, to go into the circle, perform that physical gesture as they tell the group these stories” (Miller, *Beds* 160).

At SMU, this gesture was performed for the group in a circle, and Miller asked each participant to take approximately fifteen seconds in the center of the circle and let the gesture pull a word or a phrase from them. This word or phrase became the source material for a round of informal performances generated from the body maps. “Rebekah” performed an upward spiral gesture, which led to the word “Mama” and a piece about inheriting everything from her mother except her eyes, which were the only thing that “belonged” to her father. “Mark” performed a piece about being teased for having very sensitive nipples as an adolescent, which marked his body as feminine (see Chapter 5 for fuller descriptions of these pieces).

In workshops with a final showing or performance, the body maps are often hung in the lobby or entrance space as a way to introduce the audience to the performers. Alex Reed, who performed in *Litmus* at the University of Colorado Boulder told me, “I ended up liking my Body Map so much I kept it” (Reed).

Day 3: Transformation

On the third day of a weeklong workshop, Miller encourages the group to shift their focus to

that space around transformation, around things they want to move, change, in that kind of Jill Dolan-y utopian performance, that we use performance to engender both change inside ourselves, change in our outer worlds. And to get their performative utopian thinking cooking. And that unleashes lots of energy

for people. It's about moments where we claimed agency, that we find it in our bodies, that we see how it goes out into the world in our third meeting through landscapes of transformation and getting people's social vision cooking [. . .]

Actually imagine your social vision and your performer self are integrated, which I think is a really good thing. (Miller 2012)

The transformation is generally an outgrowth of the body mapping; Miller asks the group to imagine where these changes might live in their bodies. In small groups, the workshop participants ask their partners to draw an image or symbol on their bodies, and then direct their partners in a brief performance of that transformation they hope to create in themselves.



Fig. 2. An SMU student shows the symbol she asked her partners to draw on her. Photo by Heidi Schmidt.

Day 4: Free Writing

Then the fourth day, we do a kind of intensive writing [. . .] Our body has one way of expressing itself, our voice has another, our writer selves do it in another. [By] changing the entry point for the creative act, we might get at something through our body that we wouldn't get through our writing or vice versa. And partly because [at the end of] that fourth meeting, in my classic week, they need to leave with a piece that's almost ready to be born, that they've written, that they've got a first draft. They direct it physically with their partners, so it gets graphed instantly, [. . .] so it's up in its fully physical heat. And then they can come back the next day with a study which then gets shaped into . . . you know, with some ensemble stuff, into our sixth day performance. (Miller 2012 interview)

This uncensored free-writing is done on the same over-sized paper as the body maps; sometimes on a fresh sheet and sometimes on the back of the map itself. The performer often reads directly from the text as part of the do-thru that results. Miller's choice to leave the intensive writing to the end (or nearly the end) of the workshop is intentional:

For tens of thousands of years our species didn't use paper; we just had the stories inside of us. It's good to have a period where paper isn't coming into it. Instead we can focus on the breath and body and presence and the moment. I do a lot of workshop exercises about how to re-negotiate a relationship to words on paper and how words arrive there. Actors really like these exercises, because usually they're tortured by their papers, their scripts, being "on book," "off

book,” all that. For me the best stuff comes when I work improvisationally around a kind of inquiry I’ve done, around the kind of narrative I’m interested in. [. . .] Then usually right after I improvise a story, I write it down. While it’s still fresh and still sweaty on your skin, the words are still there, and they’re words that live as you speak them, shout them, chant them, sing them. They’re in breath meter already because that’s where they came from. Since I know any stories that I tell in performance are going to be real time, spoken breath, it’s much better if it begins with breath, with spoken voice. (Miller, *Beds* 254-5)

The Spectrum

Depending on the timeline and structure of the residency, Miller sometimes incorporates an exercise I call “The Spectrum” (Miller does not always name it; “sometimes I call it ‘this side-that side,’ he told me via email [Miller, “SMU”]). Two ends of the space are identified as Miller calls out various pairings of opposite characteristics; the workshop participants place themselves at either end of this spectrum. Dog people to this side, cat people to that side, for example. Miller initially developed this exercise at SMU, and used it within a performance for the first time at the University of Colorado Boulder in *Litmus* (see Chapter 4). He has since incorporated it into several performances with full audience participation.

The first few pairings are generally “softballs:” identifying yourself as a cat person or a dog person generally doesn’t come with a significant amount of vulnerability or self-revelation. As the participants become more comfortable with the exercise, the questions’ stakes are raised. The participants also begin to explore the middle ground between the two ends of the room as they recognize that their responses are both/and or in between as much as they are

either/or. Are you gay or straight? Do you identify as a man or a woman? Are you more in touch with your masculine or feminine side? Did you grow up hunting and with guns around you or with no guns at all? Do you believe in the right to bear arms or in a world without guns? Do you believe a woman should be in control of her own body or that the state should have control? Do you believe in God or don't believe in God? (Miller mentioned that Alex Reed in Colorado was the first to introduce this question and that he's consistently incorporated it since then.) Miller opens it up for workshop participants to add their own questions. From SMU: Are you registered to vote or not registered to vote? Have you had an orgasm in this building or haven't had an orgasm in this building? Did you discover your sexuality with a partner or did you discover your sexuality independently?

Several of the *Litmus* performers described moments from this exercise in the rehearsal room. Stephanie Spector told me:

We were only planning on doing it for like half an hour, and I think we did it for like two hours of rehearsal, 'cause we had so much to talk about. It was so interesting to see where people stood because we didn't know each other that well. I remember Chas Crawford and I were on the same side of the room for pretty much everything. And so we started talking after that, and now he's one of my best friends because we realized how much we had in common just by doing this, "go to this side if you're that, go to this side if you're that." [. . .] One of the ones that I asked was people who were for Greek life and people who were against it. Because at the time I was really involved with my sorority. And Chas and myself were the only people on the pro side, and everybody else on

the other side. And it was just this moment of seeing that connection. Obviously at the end of the day it didn't matter, but it's just kind of interesting to see where everyone stood on things.

Schmidt: And I like that phrase "where people stood" because in this case it's quite literal.

Spector: Right, exactly. (Spector)

Eddy Jordan recalled a moment when a student was singled out in the course of the Spectrum exercise:

This one time [Miller] did "Democrat or Republican." The whole cast minus one person went to one side. But Tim really had this genuine appreciation for this person who stood alone and was a Republican. [. . .] Tim really respected the hell out of it. And I thought that was a great moment for me, 'cause I could see the maturity of both of them. (Jordan)

The exercise was incorporated into *Litmus* as a pre-show; for the twenty minutes between the house opening and the start of the show, Miller announced a series of binary questions from a microphone, and the cast placed themselves on a diagonal line across the stage space while the audience filtered in and took their seats.

Miller's Solo Performances within Residencies

Many of Miller's residencies include both Miller as teacher and Miller as performer. "It feels important for me to perform at some point. People want me to, I'm there anyway, it doesn't cost any more" (Miller, 2012 interview). Miller expressed some concerns, however, about how seeing him perform might affect the experience of the workshop participants. "I

don't want people to think they have to do a highly text-based monologue with lots of humor and politics, you know, and narrativity. That's my version of things." Because of this, Miller felt for a long time that "it was better if they hadn't seen me perform." Recently, he has reevaluated his position:

Lately . . . at Ohio University I performed the first day I was there, and there were like 300 students there, and it was very buzzy. And I was working with a huge group, like 30 students; it was way too big. I felt like it actually—I don't know—that somehow me performing unleashed them in a different way. And it didn't mean that they performed like me, but it meant that they . . . it gave them permission to make their own choices. It made me start to think maybe it was good to swap that out, and that actually to give them a little model of how one artist has negotiated this in a world, social vision, performance kind of thing seemed good, I thought. [. . .] I think it's good for them to see me. Just like with faculty, it's interesting for them to see . . . students want to see their acting professors act, to see them in action. [. . .] They want to make sure that you actually can do some of this stuff. It would be weird if I didn't perform, I think. It would be "Why does he think he knows anything about this?" (Miller, 2012 interview)

Miller prefers to schedule his solo performance late in the residency (if possible) to allow the students to find their own style before experiencing his. While in residence at CU-Boulder directing *Litmus*, Miller performed his solo show *Glory Box* at the end of the second week of rehearsals, after the group had already spent a significant period of time creating their

own work and finding their own performance style. Bernadette Sefic, one of the performers, told me when I interviewed her that

It was really meaningful to me to see his piece, *Glory Box*, while we were doing ours. I really enjoyed that. I don't think I would enjoy it as much if we hadn't been working with him exclusively, and kind of getting little hints of it every day. I don't think that I would have even understood our final project as much if I hadn't seen his. Watching that meant a lot to me. And it's hard because you don't want to watch anyone else's because it's supposed to be so original and as soon as you see something else, it influences your work. But the fact that it happened so close to us going up, without a lot of room to change, it meant a lot to me. I got to work with this guy. (Sefic)

Putting Together the Performance

The nature of the final performances at the end of Miller teaching residencies varies, but the majority include the minimal aesthetic that Miller prefers and that the availability of time and technical resources often requires. Miller is responsible for coordinating the show order, which he usually does between days four and five of the rehearsal process. Some workshops have an over-arching theme that provides a connective thread; others rely more heavily on Miller's ability to locate the underlying connections between and among the pieces that are created. Andryn Arithson, who performed in both *DocumentNation* and *Litmus*:

Tim has a way of choosing prompts and things that creates a really strong common thread, but it allows for each individual to really put their own stamp on it and have their own contribution, and be the director, and be the actor, and

the creator all together. And he has a way of definitely giving his input and helping it to become cohesive. He takes the leadership role when he needs to, to make those calls. (Arithson)

The performances generally include very few technical elements; Miller often creates a couple of looks on a lightboard, which he runs himself during the show. “They still end up looking great, just from a few looks and running it rock and roll style just off washes and things” (Miller 2012 interview).

Process over Product

For performers coming from a more traditional theatre creation background with several weeks of rehearsals, the speed with which Miller and the workshop participants in the room create performance can be terrifying. Miller, however, has

figured out how to make it an asset. But it is an asset. It’s not forced . . . that speed . . . it’s being on deadline. I mean when do we ever get any writing done except for the deadline? It’s just using that. But I am pleased it doesn’t seem to terrorize the process, and by all rights it probably should. It should be more anxiety-producing – maybe it is for them. But I didn’t really think so, ’cause I talk about it a lot. The first day I tell people we’re going to build this day by day, I have absolute confidence we’ll make something beautiful for the end of the week, really allow your process to be there, don’t let the clock ticking freak you out. And I think people kind of hear that. I’m sure some of them get anxious. But because I’m not communicating fear about that – well, he’s done this before, so [laughs] he probably knows that we’re gonna be fine. (Miller 2012)

In addition to Miller's general confidence that something important, watchable, and beautiful will come from the prompts he has developed over several decades teaching, his focus is on the *process over product* (i.e. what story do you need to tell *now*, not what performance do you want your friends to watch tomorrow).

Karen Dabney reflected on her experience with *Litmus*, and felt that it was “almost a selfish process in that I think we got the most out of it. [. . .] The performance was just to show people, hey, this is what we're doing. We did all this stuff, and we learned all this stuff about ourselves and our ability to express ourselves” (Dabney Interview). Daniel Leonard, also part of the *Litmus* ensemble, agreed, noting that he preferred the first time his fellow performers discovered and performed a moment in the rehearsal room to the final performance. “The first time they did ‘em, we all died, and they were so amazing, and there was something so raw about that. And that's what's so . . . it's almost heartbreaking, because as soon as they were done the first time, they were never as good as they were the first time. [. . .] Now it's a practiced piece instead of a raw piece” (Leonard). Brad Steinmeyer commented that

Everyone was so deeply moved by [the final performance]. And I wish I could share that whole rehearsal process with them, 'cause I feel like that would move them even more, seeing how we got there and witnessing all the other pieces that we wrote. I just wish that . . . like, “You guys are missing so much.”

(Steinmeyer)

End of Day Wrap Up

At the end of each day of rehearsal, Miller gathers the participants together to mark the work they created that day. Miller asks participants to briefly comment on what their peers

created that stood out to them, and he follows suit. Ron Zank, who performed in *DocumentNation* and several other Miller workshops, described the value of Miller's daily commentary.

I'm not sure exactly how he does it, but he really encourages you to dig deep, and reveal a lot, and commit to something really, really personal. That is something that really strikes me every time I work with him. [laughs] There is something really powerful when he was wrapping up each session, or each day, and pointing out individual moments of performance or personal narrative or personal revelation and your name is mentioned. There is a power in that. It's not just a name drop, he's really pointing things out. But then, I think too it sort of encourages or entices other people to dig deep and work hard. (Zank)

Conclusion

The preceding exercises form the general structure and building blocks of Miller's workshop process. The progression is designed to assist workshop participants in developing a stronger awareness of the ways memory and identity live in their bodies, identifying the most present stories that need to be told *here* and *now*, and methods for performing those stories in collaboration with fellow workshop participants.

The following chapters will explore three variations on this workshop structure. The general trajectory remains consistent, but the length of the workshop processes and the form of the final performances (or the absence of a final showing) necessitate Miller's expansion or compression of the usual structure to fit the needs of each project. Chapter 3 explores a highly compressed workshop experience, in which Miller and thirty performers created a performance

in two and a half days, then performed it on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The location of *DocumentNation* in a public, outdoor space in our nation's capital and the timeframe in which the piece was created offer an opportunity to investigate what happens when Miller must pare down this workshop structure to its most basic elements, with the added pressure of a public final performance.

Chapter 3

DocumentNation on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

For the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE)'s annual conference in August 2012, the organization selected the theme of "Performance as/is Civic Engagement: Advocate, Collaborate, Educate," due in part to the conference's location that year "in the nation's capitol on the eve of a presidential election," as ATHE President Bill Doan noted in the conference program (4). As part of the conference, Tim Miller was invited by ATHE leadership to conduct a workshop with conference attendees resulting in a performance on the National Mall. The performance was centered on the foundational documents of the United States and the performers' relationships to those documents. As the Call for Performers (posted on ATHE's website) asks, "How does the bill of sale for a slave in Virginia in 1857 collide with the Declaration of Independence and then ricochet off a Marriage License for a same sex couple in Iowa in 2009?" (ATHE "Call").

Each ensemble member selected a "founding document that speaks strongly to their sense of self" in advance of the conference, and eleven hours of rehearsal were scheduled over two and a half days during the conference for the creation and development of the project ("Call"). During this highly compressed time period, thirty-two professors, instructors, graduate and undergraduate students created, rehearsed, and performed an ensemble piece under Miller's direction titled *DocumentNation*. The cast performed on the lawn of the National Mall

late in the afternoon on Saturday, August 4, 2012 for an audience of approximately 125 conference attendees, who were bused over to the Mall from the conference hotel. The documents selected for the project included the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts, Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," testimony given before the House Un-American Activities Committee, Title IX, the 1848 Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, the Declaration of Independence, union protest songs, and many others. These pieces were performed outdoors on a hot afternoon (the temperature that afternoon reached 98°) with the United States Capitol building as the backdrop to the performance and the Washington Monument rising up behind the audience.

The *DocumentNation* process followed the same trajectory as other Miller workshops. The workshop's placement within an academic conference and the performance's location on the National Mall, however, set this case study apart in three ways. First, this case study offers an opportunity to expand the ways the immediacy of Miller's performance and teaching techniques apply to personal narrative in the present tense. Working with foundational documents required the participants to engage with the relationship between personal and political narrative in a more explicit manner than is often called for in Miller's workshops. In Chapter 1, I discussed the ways Miller's workshops encourage the expression of personal narrative and memory as written on the body. Many of Miller's exercise prompts focus on scars, family history, and our relationships with our bodies. By framing this workshop and performance with foundational documents, the memories being expressed are both personal and national; the ensemble used the body and the body politic as memoir. The location expanded the immediacy of the *now* to also include the impact of the *here*. In other words, the

ensemble was able to explore what was on their “front burner” in the *here and now* as well as the *then and now*.

Second, the abbreviated timeframe and the location added a significant pressure on Miller and the performers to create work quickly that would be performed in a public forum for their peers and potential employers. Third, the inclusion in an academic conference led to a faculty-heavy ensemble. *DocumentNation* included some independent artists and scholars, several graduate students and at least one undergraduate student, but was primarily made up of theatre and performance faculty from institutions around the country. As a result, many of these participants discussed the impact of the workshop on their teaching methodologies rather than on their current or future performance careers.

Chapter Methodology

I conducted eight interviews with *DocumentNation* participants, plus one interview with then-president of ATHE, Bill Doan. This chapter also includes material from two interviews with Tim Miller. Total audio transcribed: seven hours, thirty-seven minutes (59,348 words in transcription). Interviews were conducted between March and November 2014, or eighteen to twenty-seven months after the fact. The performance was also filmed, and is available (as of this writing) on ATHE’s YouTube channel. I also rely on my own recollections as a participant and performer in this project.

Immediacy of Time and Place

Miller called *DocumentNation* “the only time in our lives that any of us are going to address the foundational documents in hellishly hot D.C. on the Mall. Everything about that was new. And I was really pleased with that” (Miller 2012 interview). Miller’s personal prompts are

often about connecting memories from an individual's past (childhood, etc.) to the present and into the future. This process worked in a similar capacity, but the memories (or documents) are cultural or historical rather than personal, or national memory rather than personal memory. How do these collective memories and documents relate to our individual and collective identity today, and how was that identity formed? Are there instances of standing up to authority that went into the claiming of that national identity? Speaking truth to power and saying "no" to authority still figured significantly into this process.

Several performers told me that the performance on the National Mall was a major factor in their decision to sign up for *DocumentNation*. Karen Gygli told me that "just being in front of the Capitol, being in that space, which really was kind of the payoff for me, that was kind of one of the reasons I really wanted to do it; [it] was just so thrilling and so amazing" (Gygli). Ron Zank also felt that "there's a real incredible power with something like performing on the National Mall, just because there's so much history and so much resonance there. And then there's also just that contrast between the way you'll often see it depicted in film and then the practicality of performing on dirt and rough grass" (Zank). Christina Tsoules Soriano remembers "looking at the Monument and just having this moment of . . . this is part protest, part performance. It felt very powerful. It felt very communal. The words of the Constitution just felt meaningful in a very different way than any other way I ever encountered them" (Soriano). Alicia Tafoya told me that this project created a sense of connection to Washington, D.C. she hadn't experienced before:

I still feel connected to that place. And as a Latino coming to Washington, [. . .] I didn't feel like I belonged, I felt like a visitor. But having had that experience

there [on the Mall], it was like I now have an invisible ribbon that no matter where I go in the world, I still have that tie to there. My family didn't come here through Ellis Island. My family didn't immigrate into the United States. My family came in 1492 and had an original family land grant from King Philip in New Mexico. So we were here before the United States was founded. I don't identify with the building of the nation, and the pioneers, and all this stuff that people talk about. I never really identified with D.C. as a place that I really understood or was of great importance. But now I have that. And it was just breathtaking to see everyone, all of you, with the Washington Monument in the background. It was just beautiful. Let's do it again! (Tafoya)

Miller is accustomed to working under significant time pressure. As previously discussed, the majority of his teaching residencies take place over a one week span ("Most of these are this crazy process, which I'm good at. I know how to have five rehearsals and have something" [2012 interview]). *DocumentNation* was compressed even further; Miller and the thirty-two performers began Thursday morning (August 2) and performed two and a half days later on Saturday afternoon (August 4). The total rehearsal time amounted to eleven hours.

About two months after the completion of *DocumentNation*, Miller told me:

That process was going to kill me. That's the extreme edge of the high wire, insane, outdoors, at a high pressure academic conference where all of our fates are on the chopping block [we both laugh – a bit nervously?]. Me as much as any ABD, somebody starting to put the feelers out on the job market. I'm there on the job market, too. It's different, but it's not that different. I felt enormous

pressure. [. . .] That was probably unwise for my health. It would have been very reasonable for all kinds of reasons for that to be a disaster, or a mess. And it was, I thought, really beautiful . . . it would have been better if we'd had two weeks, or five days instead of two and a half. But I don't know if it would have been that much better. It thought it was exquisite – the images and pieces. We had the time we had. But that *was* too fast. (2012 interview)

I mentioned to Tim that a few participants had referenced his confidence and his calm throughout the process. He responded, "I'd been stressed for weeks. Performing outside is ten times harder than indoors, more complicated. It was taking some work to keep my morale up" (2015 interview). Ron Zank, a PhD student from the University of Missouri-Columbia when he participated in *DocumentNation*, compared the timeline of the *DocumentNation* process to a one week workshop he had participated in with Miller about four years prior. "[With] *Body Maps*, at least we had a week. We could sort through things, you can sleep on something and then go, 'Oh, I just realized this'" (Zank).

Miller routinely breaks a larger group into smaller units to respond to individual prompts. In the other processes I have observed and/or participated in, multiple small group configurations are used throughout the week before a final group is selected or assigned. Given the time frame for *DocumentNation*, the first group we were placed in remained consistent throughout the process. Logistically, this was a necessary step in creating a performance in less than three days. It contributed, however, to several participants telling me that they had limited connections with anyone outside of their small group. They commented on both the trust that developed quickly within the rehearsal room and the ephemerality of those

relationships. Andryn Arithson “really bonded *with the four people that I performed with*. I think that’s another part of working in Tim’s way, whatever you want to call it. You almost instantly bond with those people because you depend on each other so much” (Arithson, my emphasis). Ron Zank also noted that the extreme speed of this process impacted the feeling of ensemble and trust that generally accompanies Miller’s work. “With *DocumentNation*, I recognize most of the people who were part of the process, [but] I couldn’t tell you all their names. [. . .] It was exciting, but it was also challenging in that regard. You really are trusting strangers because you don’t even have time to get to know each other that well” (Zank). Alicia Tafoya felt that “there was an energy and a unity that I’ll never be able to get anywhere else that I still feel,” but also acknowledged she has “lost connection with what faces were there. Most of them I couldn’t identify, unless I went back and looked at the pictures” (Tafoya).

The compressed timeline, combined with an outdoor performance location, also introduced some logistical challenges. All of the rehearsals took place within conference rooms at the hotel until about one hour before the performance, when we arrived at the Mall for the first time. Zank commented that in the performance, “there was a strong element of improvisation and making it up on the fly. Not what we were doing, but where it happened, and who’s going to help with this part, and what’s going to take place” (Zank). Despite the challenges, Miller was pleased with the resulting performance: “I’ve never felt so blessed that something so complicated, with so little prep, could come together so gorgeously” (2015 interview).

Curriculum

Unlike the other case studies described within this dissertation, *DocumentNation* did not take place within an institution of higher learning. This does not mean this project is disconnected from questions of curriculum development. The majority of participants in *DocumentNation* either teach theatre and performance studies in colleges or universities, or aspire to. *DocumentNation* taught its participants how to better teach and facilitate devised work with students at their home institutions. In my interviews with Miller workshop participants, I asked interviewees to reflect back on the experience and consider whether it has impacted how they pursue their craft (writing, performing, teaching, etc.). From the *DocumentNation* participants, I received a lot of feedback about how the experience impacted their teaching and gave them permission to engage devised work from a place of experience, not just theory.

Alicia Tafoya has “started to do more devised elements in my classrooms”(Tafoya). Karen Gygli spoke of asking her actors to hold hands as a form of extended introduction, in class or in rehearsal, and employing some of Miller’s “flash performances” in her acting classes.

[We] hold hands at the beginning and talk on the first day, before we get started.

[. . .] It just breaks down—people are just like, “What? What?” and then “Okay, this is nice, just holding hands.” I used something similar to boxing with the national anthem, give them something they’re doing physically and then have something they all know – happy birthday, or whatever – and doing it in time to what they’re doing. (Gygli)

Kaufmann felt that participating in *DocumentNation* added legitimacy to his teaching work, even though he had previous experience devising theatre.

It wasn't this mysterious thing that I couldn't imagine reproducing. We've got the theme, the prompt, it's rich, it connects to us, we're in a beautiful place, we've got creative people [. . .] dividing up into small groups. We have a deadline, [we] have an interesting prompt. To be able to say, "No, really, guys. Seriously, trust this. This is what we did in D.C. and it came out great." I think without the *DocumentNation* experience, it might have felt like I was cheating.

(Kaufmann)

Zach Sudbury commented on the ways actually engaging in the process increased his confidence in both teaching and creating devised work:

It gave me a real experience, an embodied experience in that kind of work. I mean, it's one thing to read it, [but] it's still not the same as having been there and done it. I taught a section of U.S. Theatre History at Penn State the last semester I was there, and I did a section on Tim Miller and I was able to really draw on that experience in order to teach it. The other thing that it's done is make devised work an option. [. . .] I wouldn't be comfortable doing that just reading it out of a book. So it's opened up that as a possibility in my own creative work and also as an important devised work and solo performance work – opened up that as a possibility for something I can claim some authority to teach, and that I think is important to teach. (Sudbury)

Preparation for the Conference and Performance

Bill Doan, president of ATHE the year *DocumentNation* was created and performed, first met Tim Miller (appropriately enough) at a previous ATHE conference. “I actually first met Tim the first time he performed at ATHE, which was . . . oh my god, twenty-five years ago? It had to have been somewhere near then. And he performed *My Queer Body*. [. . .] So that’s when we first met and I became aware of his work and started following his work” (Doan). Since then, Doan has invited Miller as a guest artist to two institutions: Miami University (Ohio) in 2007, and twice to Penn State University, “once for a full week’s residency workshopping performance and then we brought him back for a weekend intensive with our MFA actors” (Doan). Doan and the other conference organizers began preparation about a year and a half in advance of the 2012 conference, starting with identifying a theme. Doan continues:

Because we knew we were going to be in D.C., we wanted the theme to involve democracy and education, and Tim was kind of at the top of my list of people we should think about. [. . .] So I pitched the idea to Mark [Lecoco] as VP for the conference because as the president, you need to let the vice president for conference and the conference committee do their work. I made it clear to the committee that I had a real vested interest in this, and I would certainly like to see these kinds of themes and emphasis happen, and I felt there was a role for Tim, but I wasn’t trying to prescribe that role in any way, shape, or form. But Mark was also very supportive of that and the committee responded very positively to it as well. That’s kind of how the seed got planted. (Doan)

Doan also expressed an awareness on the part of the committee that conferences can be difficult financially for freelance artists who have no institutional support. “It’s expensive for everybody, but freelancers really have nobody to fall back on but themselves” (Doan). In an effort to “get more bang for our buck” and to make it financially viable for Miller to commit to the conference, he was invited as a workshop presenter to create *DocumentNation* and as a keynote performer to present his solo show *Lay of the Land* as part of the conference program (Doan).

Miller’s *Lay of the Land* was performed in one of the conference hotel ballrooms; *DocumentNation*, however, was scheduled for an outdoor performance on the National Mall. When I spoke with Doan, I asked him about the logistics of securing that space; he started laughing before I finished commenting that I expected the Mall was a far more complicated endeavor than a performance inside the hotel would have been. “Oh my god, yes.” He went on to explain that the majority of the legwork fell to Executive Director Nancy Erickson and that year’s vice president for conferences Mark Lecoco.

We had to work with the National Parks, we had to get permits, we had to get clearance on everything, we had to be very specific about what we planned, we had to line up the buses. The logistics of it took months. [. . .] Working with the National Parks organization can be . . . it’s a huge bureaucracy. It was endless amounts of phone calls and follow up and nudging and pushing and “Hey, we’re getting closer to the date, are we guaranteed this?” Then there were [last minute] construction issues, and I believe the site got moved from where we originally thought it would be. [. . .] The logistics of that were really complicated,

and I know Mark and Nancy spent an endless amount of time, and I know they had to communicate with Tim because there were certain dos and don'ts – none of them were extremely prohibitive, I mean lots of stuff happens on the National Mall, so we weren't anomalous to them or anything, [but it] required us to make early decisions, get commitments early, to leave us all leeway we needed to get the work done. (Doan)

Miller also commented on the stress caused by the last minute change from one planned location on the Mall to another. "Yeah, that was really pushing our luck." He continues:

It was probably the most complicated thing they've ever done at a conference, and perhaps they will never do something like that again. [laughing] It was really hard for them, too. I was pretty much out of the logistics with the National Park Service and the rental company. I mean I knew what was coming, but they had done a lot of work. It was pretty intense for them, on top of the conference.

(2015 interview)

A call for performers was posted on the ATHE website with the rest of the conference information in early 2012, and the call was also circulated via email (Miller sent it to me in March 2012). The project's description reads:

How does the bill of sale for a slave in Virginia in 1857 collide with the Declaration of Independence and then ricochet off a Marriage License for a same sex couple in Iowa in 2009? This is the kind of question the *DocumentNation* performance project will engage as it explores what national documents mean to different communities/identities across time. Under the direction of Tim Miller,

an internationally acclaimed solo performer and devised performance director, a group of volunteer performers will examine the collision of foundational documents that inform our society. Using a fast-paced workshop process, participants will create an ensemble piece and perform it on the Mall as part of ATHE's 2012 conference. This performance project offers ATHE members a unique opportunity to enhance their creative experience at the 2012 conference, while also engaging in valuable professional development. (ATHE "Call")

Participation in *DocumentNation* was open to any ATHE member attending the annual conference; members could select the workshop as part of their conference registration at no additional charge. Registration was on a first come, first served basis, but Miller and Doan did exert some effort recruiting participants; Miller forwarded the call for performers to many of his academic contacts with whom he'd previously worked, and Doan told me that the committee

wanted to make sure Tim had some infrastructure inside the workshop if he needed people to help, or to be team leader. This was going to be a larger group than he normally worked with and a very time intensive, labor intensive, quick amount of time. So there were a couple of folks that we sort of curated into the process just to be there as Tim needed them. (Doan)

The participant makeup for *DocumentNation* varied from that in other Miller-facilitated workshops in college or university contexts; Miller generally works with groups of undergraduate students and, to a lesser degree, graduate students. Occasionally a faculty

member will participate in these workshops as well.³ *DocumentNation* featured a cast primarily made up of theatre and performance studies faculty at institutions throughout the United States, with a handful of independent scholars, graduate students, and at least one undergraduate student.⁴ Miller described it as an “extraordinary gathering of undergrads, grad students, young professors, faculty chairs – what an incredible community of our practice. The composition of that group was really hopeful in itself, of who’s getting together to work and committing the [eleven] hours we had of preparation” (2015 interview). Zach Sudbury remembers thinking, “wow, this is a broad group,” which included both performers and scholars, “though there’s obviously a lot of crossover. And some students all the way to established professors” (Sudbury).

Of the eight *DocumentNation* participants who made themselves available for interviews, three were graduate students at the time of the project, three were fulltime theatre faculty members; one was an independent artist and scholar; and one was a fulltime dance professor. Many participants were familiar with Miller’s work and had some experience working with devised theatre projects. Freelance director and teacher Alicia Tafoya knew of

³ Miller also teaches workshops at arts centers, community centers, and museums. Because this study focuses primarily on the workshops he teaches in academic contexts, however, I am comparing *DocumentNation* to other academically situated projects in terms of who participated.

⁴ I have been unable to confirm the exact breakdown for the workshop. The conference program lists names and institutions of participants. However, it lists 37 participants; the performance included 32. The program also omits a participant’s status as student or faculty member. My claim about the participant makeup is based on my own recollections, comments from other participants and from Miller.

Miller's political activism and solo career through her graduate studies, and had done an intensive workshop with Augusto Boal in Omaha. John Kaufmann, Theatre Arts faculty at Beloit College, had done some devised work while pursuing an MFA in directing at the University of Iowa, and later while living in Seattle. "I was interested in those shows that didn't exist before a group came together. And then now at Beloit, I teach a class in devising, and I've learned a lot in teaching that" (Kaufmann). Jodi Jinks, Mary Lou Lemon Endowed Professor at Oklahoma State University, has been doing autobiographical devised work in prison populations in Oklahoma and Texas since 2006. "Coming from a Stanislavski-based acting technique, it was really crazy to try to do that work. To re-calibrate the brain, what does this look like, what does this feel like? [. . .] I lived as an actor for fifteen years, living in Washington, D.C. and Chicago, and then New York and then Los Angeles" (Jinks). After touring *Titanic, the Musical* for sixteen months, Jinks opted out of that life.

I had a two-year-old boy at that time. And started teaching. Teaching in Texas at A&M, just for a couple of years, then moved to Austin and that's how I got involved with the Rude Mechs and started doing devised work with them. Then took a workshop with Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver [who] had been working in prisons in England. [. . .] My idea of art was really turning and changing. And I knew of Tim Miller from the NEA Four, but just in a very academic way. And when I heard he was working ATHE, I had just won the tenure track line at Oklahoma State, and I thought I am gonna work with this guy. I've known about him for years, and I want to be part of this. (Jinks)

Karen Gygli, an associate professor of theatre, Tim Russert Department of Communication and Theatre Arts, John Carroll University in Cleveland, is “a PhD, not an MFA,” and sees herself as a “scholar/director type educator” rather than an actor or performer, and had less experience with devised work than the other faculty participants I spoke with. “What really attracted me to that process was I thought he sounded cool, I thought the process of just performing on the Mall, and doing a devised thing and I hadn’t done a lot of devised theatre, just sounded great. And I just said, ‘okay, why not?’” (Gygli).

Christina Tsoules Soriano (“I was the one that was super pregnant in the piece”) knew Miller personally from several workshops he had conducted at Wake Forest University, where she is a member of the dance faculty, but had not worked with him directly.

He mentioned he was going to ATHE, and I was like, “Oh, it’s in D.C., it’s not too far, the dates are good.” The theme of ATHE was a very welcoming one that year for people in more ancillary theatre identities. And then when I learned that it was about the notion of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and being on the Mall – it all just kind of hit home, and felt like something . . . the pieces all kind of fell into place. And I was really excited that it could be something that I could do. And Tim was super excited and was like, “Can we write on your belly?” and I said, “Yeah!” (Soriano)

Andryn Arithson, a graduate student from the University of Colorado Boulder, participated in *DocumentNation* a few months before assistant directing and performing in *Litmus* at CU-Boulder (see Chapter 4). Zach Sudbury had completed an MFA in Acting at Penn State, where Miller had recently been invited for a one week residency. Sudbury did not

participate in that workshop, but attended the performance that resulted, and heard positive responses from his colleagues about the process and about Miller. “And I thought I missed out. But then ATHE came up, and since I was kind of shifting gears toward doing a PhD, I went to *DocumentNation* – I went to ATHE and signed up to participate with that. That was my first time working with him specifically” (Sudbury). As an actor, Sudbury was more comfortable in the realm of realistic or Meisner-based performing techniques, and felt “a little apprehensive” about being pushed outside of his comfort zone.

I was really interested in the idea of devised work and of solo performance. So even though I hadn’t taken it on specifically, I was ready to dive in and see how he works, what he was going to have me do. Have us do. And then I liked the idea of the framing of it, too, with the connection to we were going to be in Washington, D.C., so it was specific to the place and specific to something that we were all going to share. Looking at documents, but looking at them in a different way towards performance. It was a really interesting idea, so I was excited. (Sudbury)

Ron Zank had collaborated with Miller several times before joining *DocumentNation*: a brief performance workshop at the University of Iowa; a weeklong residency project at the University of Missouri titled *Body Maps*; and a third mini workshop in LA that coincided with, but was not directly connected to the ATHE conference. Miller had also conducted a *Body Maps* weeklong workshop at Lamar University, where Zank was a Visiting Instructor. “I was not part of the workshop, but I had students who were taking part and obviously I saw their performance” (Zank). When he heard about *DocumentNation* (via an ATHE email announcing conference

events), he was on the fence about participating. He was aware that it would be a significant time commitment and might take him away from other conference opportunities. Also, he didn't want to take the opportunity to work with Miller away from anyone else. "I don't want to be the Tim hog as far as anytime he does anything at an academic conference" (Zank). Zank mentioned to Miller he was considering the workshop, "and [Miller] said it should be really fun, and it's nice to have people who've worked with me before, so that's sort of how I said 'Yeah, let me go ahead and do this'" (Zank).

Miller emailed each participant in advance of the conference, asking us to first select a foundational document that held some personal significance for us. From a May 15 email:

I am especially interested in relating to the big, juicy, received National Archives sense (Declaration of Independence etc) of these documents but even more in widening the definition out to some of the more problematic and competing histories of the paper trail of our country. [. . .] The project will embrace a wide definition of what these foundational documents are as they become fuel for us to create an ensemble performance in a fast and furious rehearsal process. [. . .] Each performer will need to choose a really crucial Foundational Document that speaks to your identity and personal urgency. (Miller, "DocumentNation Performance")

Eleven days before the performance, we were also asked to acquire and bring a thirty foot length of "cloth ribbon with a max of 50 words from your text magic marked on it" to the conference. Miller wanted us

to write these on a sturdy strip of cloth ribbon, one inch wide and heavy enough that we can pull on them, weave them, tug of war them, make images. NOT SHINY. One inch wide (or no less than 3/4 of an inch wide) and 30 feet long. Maybe in ropery colors, white, beige, tan, parchment etc. Write in heavy marker in black. This will be our set, our prop, our visual, our marking of space, our ticker tape parade, our woven tug-of-war rope. Full of possibilities. (Miller, "Ribbon")

Some of the performers struggled to locate an appropriate document. For Ron Zank, "my biggest challenge was coming up with a text to bring to the table. Because there wasn't anything that really, really, specifically resonated with me and the project" (Zank). Eventually, he landed on Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," but didn't decide on it until a week or two before the conference. With *Body Maps*, a week long Miller workshop Zank had participated in at the University of Missouri, "you're very much creating something from yourself and your own experience. Here, we're talking about important texts as citizens of the country, citizens of the world, and performing them on the National Mall. [laughs] No pressure" (Zank). John Kaufmann agreed. "Choosing a document was personally more frustrating than once we got in the room" (Kaufmann). He described his awareness of how status might play out in that room, and how his white male privilege (or at least its perception) might influence his document selection. "I had to get over a sense of 'Where's my struggle, where did my people suffer?' And if nothing was coming up, to own that, and say my documents, the ones that come to mind, are joyful and privileged, and to bring a voice of joy and music and history, a song that has history of Americana, an American song, felt appropriate" (Kaufmann). The document Kaufmann

selected was a song from the 1920s that had been popular within his family for several generations.

Ron Zank also remembers “trying to find appropriate ribbons in appropriate lengths and appropriate colors” being a challenge before arriving at the conference. “Which is part of the fun of working with Tim, is he gives you these impossible tasks and there’s that combination of making you do these things and let’s put on a show, and then the other half going, [Zank starts laughing] ‘God dammit, Tim. Why do you have to be so specific?’” (Zank)

“Coming into that room there was a lot of vulnerability,” according to Kaufmann. Gygli felt “a little nerve-wracked about it,” not considering herself a performer. “And the first day I walked in, I almost walked out, to be honest with you. I was a little intimidated because there were so many real professional actors, people who specialized in performance. Not like me. So it was a little scary” (Gygli), though she established a friendship with one or two fellow performers fairly quickly.

And I thought Tim was very nice, too. So I was wondering, number one, if I was going to be an idiot in front of all these people. And number two, if Tim was going to be a diva or some sort of really . . . I wondered what he was going to be like to work with, just generally. And he was great. He was just wonderful. I couldn’t believe he brought that chaos together and stayed so sane, and so polite – at least seemingly [laughing]. And had an individual touch with everybody. That was the thing, he made me feel like I was important, he made everyone feel like they were important. (Gygli)

Kaufmann also commented on Miller's ability to make everyone in the room feel welcome and appreciated. Kaufmann entered the room aware of potential status issues resulting from document selection. "What document you had was kind of connected to your status . . . for a little while. And it's not bad to have a great status card, whatever that is. But a big hurdle is getting over and through that. It comes back to Tim's facilitation of welcoming, and reducing that in ways. For me that's a big part of the process, to work in that way" (Kaufmann).

The first thing Miller asked us to do in the first rehearsal was to stand in a circle, hold hands, and introduce ourselves and our document to the group. Karen Gygli

loved that he put us in the circle and had us hold hands. I thought it was a very smart thing to do as an educator, and I thought it was a very nice thing to do. He put everybody at ease. And then we were in our groups, and [. . .] I thought, "Okay, at least I'll just try this, why not?" As an acting educator, I work with non-actors all the time and they're nervous, and putting them in small groups first is such a smart idea, it's simultaneous and everybody's doing it, and you've got buddies doing it with you. (Gygli)

The ribbons led to a "very strong visceral moment" (Zank) in rehearsal in which the participants each took our ribbons, and wove and connected them across the rehearsal room, with Zank holding all of the ribbon ends.

I was the anchor point and [that was] difficult. That moment of trying to maintain the anchor point for all those ribbons as they're being pulled in these different directions, and honestly just having body strength to balance out the

twenty-whatever, thirty-whatever people I was pulling against – the world's worst game of tug of war. But exciting, too. (Zank)

Tafoya also commented on that exercise in the rehearsal room.

Tim was asking us to pull our ribbons, open them up and unroll them and move across the floor in our exercise, and I started going the opposite direction of everybody else. And I don't know why, I just felt like that was right. I went to apologize to him [after], and he was like, "No, it's perfect, it works perfectly, don't apologize." So the idea of even self-censoring comes into play, but if you have a facilitator that's really open and understanding, they can give you that permission to create and work outside the ramifications they've given you, which is such a beautiful thing. [. . .] I'd be curious to know if everybody still has their ribbons, because I know I do. I kept mine. I pull it out every once in a while and show people. (Tafoya)

Sonja Kuftinec: Performing on the Bus

Because the performance was happening off site from the rest of the conference, a bus was arranged to transport conference attendees to the National Mall to view *DocumentNation*. Most of the cast met on the Mall in advance of the performance to walk through the last minute details, but two performers had other duties; Ron Zank was asked to manage the logistics of helping the audience locate the bus from the conference hotel and Sonja Kuftinec performed a short piece on the bus while in transit as a prologue to the rest of *DocumentNation*. Zank's role proved somewhat trying:

As I recall the buses were a little bit late, they were unsure where they were going, and then we had traffic we were dealing with. It was like every cliché of bad wedding movie scene of getting people to the church and not being able to do it on time. So it was a very practical, stage manager-y thing that needed to happen, but I also knew it was important that it happened. (Zank)

Miller selected these two because of his prior working relationship with them:

I knew I could count on Ron to organize getting people moving from the hotel, and I've worked with Sonja so much I knew I could trust her to hold that [bus aisle] space. [. . .] People said it was quite compelling. And what a burden to dump on Sonja, who was four or five months pregnant, I think. "Sonja, you can handle this, right?" [big laugh] (Miller 2015 interview)

On the bus, Kuftinec walked up and down the center aisle, describing the celebratory atmosphere of marching and dancing in a protest parade to the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul. As the protesters got closer to the convention, the parade route narrowed, and Kuftinec noticed a line of elderly people on the other side of the barriers wearing red, white, and blue T-shirts.

I ask one woman, "Why are you here?" and she says, "The police say we are not supposed to speak to each other." And I ask her again, and she says, "Stay on your side of the fence." And then I stop across from her and I stand very still and I open myself to her, and I say, "Why are you standing here?" And she says, "All of us have family in Iraq. All of us have family fighting in Iraq. While you are dancing in the streets, their bodies are on the line."

And I say, "Thank you."

And I wonder if there are places in this world where we can stand our ground and still hold differences. Or we can judge each other, not by the parties we belong to, but by the content of our character. (*DocumentNation* video)

As Zank and Kuftinec were organizing the audience, the rest of the cast was on the Mall preparing for their arrival. A platform stage had been erected in advance, with two long rows of folding chairs arranged in a semi-circle for the audience, leaving an open patch of grass for the performers to use. The majority of the performers preferred staying in the grass area rather than stepping onto the stage, which was further from the audience.

The ribbons we experimented with in the rehearsal room became the primary image of the pre-show performance. Two standing microphones were set up on either edge of the grass space, and Zach Sudbury (at 6'4") stood on the platform stage with the Capitol Building behind him. As the audience entered, each performer stood at one of the microphones and read a section from their document, written on their ribbon. Founding documents read from the microphones included the Americans with Disabilities Act, reports on the Penn State / Jerry Sandusky sexual abuse scandal, the Alien and Sedition Acts, testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, the 1848 Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, a Bob Dylan song, the poetry of Emma Lazarus, Texas HB15 which required women to receive a transvaginal ultrasound before they could obtain a legal abortion, the Louisiana Purchase, Title IX, labor movement protest songs, and many more. As each performer completed the reading of their text, they walked over to Sudbury, handed him one end of their ribbon, and carried the other end to another part of the stage as the next performer read his/her document from the other

microphone. Alicia Tafoya, whose document was the Emma Lazarus poem engraved at the base of the Statue of Liberty, joined Sudbury on the stage in the pose of the Statue. The resulting image was of a web of beige ribbons emanating from a single point on the platform stage and draped over the playing space.



Fig. 3. Zach Sudbury and Alicia Tafoya stand on the stage as the rest of the cast completes the pre-show ribbon image. Photo courtesy of Kalle Westerling.

As the center point of that opening image, Sudbury was aware of how his appearance could impact the interpretation it:

I'm very conscious that I'm a white male and kind of fit the hegemonic, masculinity image. I don't know if that was part of it, but in the performance, I think that couldn't help but be part of one interpretation of me being the white male, assumed to be Christian, assumed to be heterosexual, and all the rest,

holding everybody's documents and dreams and the Capitol right behind.

(Sudbury)

Once each performer had read his/her document, the ribbons were collected into a thick rope of documents, which was then placed in a semi-circle on the ground in front of the audience. Each small group (four performers each) from the rehearsal process remained consistent into the performance. Miller established the performance order for the eight groups, and each group took the stage and performed the four pieces they had collectively created in the order they determined within the group.

Zach Sudbury: The Extermination Order

For his own vignette, Sudbury chose an executive order signed in 1838 by Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs, known as the "Extermination Order," authorizing the forcible expulsion or extermination of Mormons from the state. Sudbury remembers "being really apprehensive" about sharing that document with the rest of the group during the first meeting.

I was sharing something about my Mormonism in a . . . [pause] largely left-leaning [group] and with all of the recent politics that the Mormon church has gotten involved in [such as the Prop 8 campaign in California], I was afraid of a certain kind of stigma, or image. And I'm like, "Great, this is the first thing we're doing." But I remember that people were interested, and Tim in particular really valued it and didn't seem to assume anything negative was attached to that. He assumed the best. He definitely has his strong opinions and he's not afraid to share those – and he does – but in those workshop environments, he really

believes that each and every individual has something true and something beautiful to share. And that's his goal, is to unlock that. (Sudbury)

In his performance, Sudbury used this “act of aggression against my people,” as he phrased it, as the connection between his religious history and his embrace of social justice movements.

“We have this in our history, how can we be horrible to other people, when people were horrible to us and it's such a part of our narrative?” (Sudbury). His piece ended with the repeated statement, “Your fight is my fight” (*DocumentNation Video*).



Fig. 4. Zach Sudbury (front) performs with the rest of his group. Photo courtesy of Kalle Westerling.

Miller later brought up Sudbury's piece during an interview, in context of the “truth-speaking” narratives that he encourages participants to explore.

I thought about Zach's piece a lot. For that young man – for him to do a Mormon piece, to me that's an exact example of what I'm talking about. That is going to

fuel him. That he got to do that, and found that permission. And the truth is in a space like that there would be lots of reasons not to do that piece, to not bring it up. There would be reasons to not put it out there, and I thought it was very bold. But that happens a lot. As a sidebar, I think this kind of work is actually super helpful for actors. Whatever else Zach does, to have at least once done a piece that's about a core – put your creativity towards a core part of self. For Zach in this incredibly public way, with the Capitol behind him. That will change your life as an artist and citizen, I think. (2012 interview)

Sudbury's self-acknowledged appearance as "hegemonic, masculinity image" also led him to be used in several of his group's vignettes to represent the abuse of white male power. I asked him during our phone interview if that was an uncomfortable position for him. He responded that:

I'm happy to help tell those stories, and sometimes you do need that representative. I'm an actor, I'm all about telling a story, and whoever I need to play to tell those stories that undermine, or subvert, or complicate white male power, I'm all for that. And the environment was so . . . so conducive to that. I never felt like I was being attacked for being that, for conforming to that image. (Sudbury)

Heidi Schmidt: Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments (1848)

Like several of my fellow performers, I had struggled to locate a document that felt relevant in both the past and present tense, and that I felt a personal connection to. In the 1848 Seneca Falls convention Declaration of Sentiments ("We hold these truths to be self-evident,

that all men and women are created equal . . .”), I found a document I had a strong appreciation and gratitude for. Throughout the process, however, I felt I was going through the motions and that my performance would be (hopefully) intellectually interesting but would likely lack the emotional power Miller had helped me achieve in previous workshops.

As the workshop progressed, my piece expanded to include the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution (“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex”), as well as a song I remember singing in my elementary school choir, which set the text of the Declaration of Independence to music. Within the song, the phrase “and women!” had been interjected in a brief pause between musical phrases. As my script (rough though it was) came together, I was able to connect a chronology of the Seneca Falls convention in 1848, the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, and a Westland Elementary School choir practice in the 1980s which the rest of my group recreated along with me. We sang the song, then I interrupted to comment on the obvious mismatch of the phrase “and women!” to the rest of the song. “Seventy-some years after my foremothers won me the right to vote, and we still can’t fit ‘and women’ into the meter of a song?”

After I had more or less finalized my script, I headed down to the rehearsal room in the conference hotel and prepared to run through the show with my group and the rest of the ensemble, still feeling disconnected from my text. As I recited the words of the 19th Amendment out loud in the run through, I was suddenly overcome by the emotion I had struggled to locate for the past two days. Tim approached me after the run through and said something along the lines of, “Don’t fight it. I know you feel uncomfortable with it, but it’s

really powerful if you let it happen. And when you get out on the National Mall with the Capitol building and Washington Monument, it's going to be magnified." I heard him, and I believed him, but I was unprepared for how much the location would impact me as I recited the Nineteenth Amendment while staring at the Washington Monument.

John Kaufmann: "Vo do de o" song

Of the four performers in my small group, three of us ended up using songs as, or in relation to, our documents. My elementary school choir song segued into Kaufmann's piece. He had selected a song from the 1920s that he'd learned from his parents, who learned it from their parents. "I realized I was born into relative privilege, so for me, America was fun and breezy, and like the song, in harmony," and proceeded to sing:

Washington at Valley Forge

Gee, it was cold, but up spoke George with

Vo do de o, vo doe doe de o, doe

Remember Patrick Henry

In his speech, famous speech

He cried "give me, give me

Liberty, or [claps] black bottom" (*DocumentNation Video*)

Kaufmann proceeded to teach the audience the chorus ("Vo do de o, vo doe doe de o, doe"), just as his parents taught him, and he planned to teach his daughter once she is old enough.



Fig. 5. John Kaufmann (right) teaches the rest of his group (left to right, Jodi Jinks, Karen Gygli, and Heidi Schmidt) the “Vo do de o” song. Photo courtesy of Kalle Westerling.

Jodi Jinks: Get Out of My Body!

Jodi Jinks developed a piece confronting recent legislation in Texas requiring a woman to undergo a transvaginal ultrasound and listen to either audio of the fetal heartbeat, or description from the doctor regarding the characteristics and internal organs of the fetus before a legal abortion could be obtained. In the piece, Jinks’s fellow performers carried her throughout the space, manipulating and flipping her body while she narrated the requirements of the legislation. In her final pose, another performer supported her back while the others held her legs spread open to mimic the physical posture of a woman on an examination table. “I refuse to look. I refuse to listen,” she proclaimed as she stepped out of the “stirrups” and pushed the other performers away. She finished the piece, standing on her own two feet for the first time, with “Get out of my body!” (*DocumentNation* video). When I spoke to her two

years later, her primary memory was of an unexpected juxtaposition between her piece and the performance's location on the National Mall:

But what I *really* remember is in the performing of that – was it John that lifted me up? Someone lifted me up, and my legs were spread, and as they were spread, I remember seeing the Washington Monument rising right between my legs in the middle of that. I thought that was hilarious. I wasn't expecting that, but there it was. So that's the takeaway I have from that. Sweating, the heat, my white pants, and that thing coming between my legs. (Jinks)

Karen Gygli: "Over There"

Karen Gygli and her husband had recently taken groups of students to San Diego and Tijuana to visit a shelter housing men in process of being deported from the United States.

"Immigration is really, really important to me" (Gygli). She continues:

I'm not an immigrant myself, but my grandparents were. I found the [1798] Alien & Sedition Acts, that was the thing that I used. It was hard to memorize, it was really hard to memorize [laughing]. [. . .] I thought, "Okay, what is my personal experience with this immigration question?" And I'm not Latino, so I can't talk about— I mean I can talk about it as somebody who went down there [to Tijuana and San Diego] and met people in detention [. . .] And I had some amazing conversations there, but I can't talk . . . I didn't feel like I could talk to that. What was something that really happened in my family that might put it in a different perspective? And I thought, "Okay, my last name is Swiss, which is unusual. And I have a bunch of Swiss relatives living outside of Cleveland, east of Cleveland. And

they stopped speaking German around 1917. [. . .] They used to use German at home all the time. And I remember my dad telling me that my grandfather at that point, all of them stopped speaking German because the neighbors would get pissed off. [. . .] Which is ridiculous, he wasn't even German. The Swiss are like, "Yay Swiss, they're peaceful and they have good banks." They didn't go to war, right? So it was ridiculous but they were German speakers and they had to be afraid of their neighbors. They'd lived in the United States for [ten years,] but suddenly the language that they used was suspect. And I remember thinking about trying to stage it. Not just say it, but stage it. So I used the "Over There" song. (Gygli)

Gygli's partners marched in place, singing George M. Cohan's iconic song while Gygli told the story of her family's choice to stop speaking German for fear of the neighbors, noting that despite his choice to stop speaking German at age seventeen, on his deathbed, her grandfather spoke *only* German.

Waltzing and Boxing to the Pledge of Allegiance

After the fourth group completed their section, the full ensemble rose and recreated a flash performance from one of the exercises in the rehearsal room; one of the combinations Miller introduced was reciting the Pledge of Allegiance while waltzing and engaging in a boxing match. In performance, this exercise allowed for both humor and elements of resistance and protest, all of which were encouraged by Miller. Several performers omitted the phrase "under God," and one performer spent this section with both middle fingers raised to the sky. Another covered his ears with his hands.



Fig. 6. The cast of *DocumentNation* pledge allegiance to the flag . . . or don't. Photo courtesy of Kalle Westerling.

Ron Zank: Whitman's "Song of Myself"

The piece Zank created interspersed the phrase "whoever degrades another, degrades me" from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" with a personal narrative about a friend who had been murdered in an anti-gay gang initiation. Zank spoke the following lines, alternating with his group of four speaking "whoever degrades another, degrades me" in between each line.

Reports of violence at a party Sunday morning, with homosexuals present.

Guys, there's someone outside the window yelling "faggot" at the window.

Reports were it was a gang initiation.

Come on, guys, we don't have to take this.

Reports of shots being fired.

Sweetie, I don't know how to tell you this. (*DocumentNation* video)

Andryn Arithson: Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments (1848)

Andryn Arithson and I both arrived at the conference having selected the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments. We started with the same document, but our pieces evolved differently; in advance of the conference, Arithson was thinking about how “women had to fight for their rights, state by state, one at a time. And queer people are also fighting for rights, state by state, and one falls after the other” (Arithson). I asked her to describe the piece she performed in Washington.

It was about gay marriage. The story of one of the first times my partner and I were out together – we weren’t even dating at the time, but we had kissed on the dance floor of a club, and this bouncer came up to us and said that we were being inappropriate, that we were touching private parts and escorted us out. They didn’t escort us out literally, but they said we couldn’t do that. So we basically said, “Well, we don’t want to be here then.” And we left. [. . .] So that was very traumatic, but from there . . . that sparked our relationship, so I guess lemonade out of lemons. [laughs] It did end up bringing us closer together and we ended up dating, and now we’re married. So my piece was about that story and the fact that we’re two drag kings and we met in a drag king troupe: Rocky Mountain Oysters. And we got married in 2012, but legally there was no recognition of that. And I don’t need legality to validate my love, but I do need legality when my partner’s in the hospital, or if we have a child one day. So it was about that process that we started watching states pass gay marriage with the hope that one day it will be here in Colorado, and then everywhere. Ideally all

types of relationships, polyamorous . . . whatever people consensually enter into will also be a part of that, because I don't want to stop with gay marriage in my little soapbox moment here. That's not the answer to everything, but it's a start.

So that's what my piece was about. (Arithson)

Alicia Tafoya: "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"

Alicia Tafoya, "a Latino coming to Washington, D.C." (as mentioned earlier in this chapter), didn't feel particularly connected to "the building of the nation, and the pioneers, and all this stuff that people talk about. [. . .] My family came in 1492 and had an original family land grant from King Philip in New Mexico. So we were here before the United States was founded" (Tafoya). Despite having no personal family history with Ellis Island, Tafoya chose Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus," which was engraved at the base of the Statue of Liberty in 1903, as a way to address immigration as an ongoing concern. "I feel like that is so iconic. It's something that has been projected onto us, it was something that was given to us, but it's a part of the American dream, the American culture, the American tradition" (Tafoya). As Tafoya read the poem in the performance, the other three members of her group lined up at the back of the grass area posed as the Statue of Liberty; each raised their right arm to the sky as if holding a torch. When Tafoya reached the most famous lines of the poem, "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" (Lazarus), the other performers interjected, "unless you're a Mexican," "as long as you make enough money," "it's best to be straight," and "it's best to be Christian," highlighting the conflict between the promises implied by the poem and the reality many contemporary immigrants face (*DocumentNation Video*).



Fig. 7. Alicia Tafoya reads from the Emma Lazarus poem “The New Colossus,” which is engraved at the base of the Statue of Liberty. Photo courtesy of Kalle Westerling.

Christina Tsoules Soriano: All People Are Created Equal

Of the thirty-two performers who participated in *DocumentNation*, two were visibly pregnant. Both pregnancies are mentioned a few times in interviews; Christina Tsoules Soriano’s pregnancy was integrated into the performance and opened the door to some potential controversy among the participants. Soriano was eight months pregnant at the time. “It’s pretty remarkable how your body changes. It’s loaded, right? You’re carrying another

person in your body. But at that point you're just so visibly pregnant" (Soriano). Zank commented that "the whole notion of dealing with a fellow performer who's pregnant is very powerful. Talk about a physical, visceral response" (Zank).

For the finale of *DocumentNation*, after the final group had performed their pieces, the entire cast spread out on the stage and read documents created by the audience. Part of Zank's duties helping the audience locate the bus and getting them to the Mall was to distribute large sheets of paper to the audience, pre-printed with the words "We the People" at the top. Zank describes the process:

So they might write something like "need to remember that we are people, that we are one people, we are not just a bunch of individual groups." So then in the performance, they were passed out among the performers so that then they could actually read from them. Which was interesting because then people were reading many things on the spot that they had never seen before, or had only seen ten seconds before. This whole notion of echoing back to the audience their own thoughts, or their own reactions to those individual statements, I think is really exciting. To think of that immediate generation of text, because this piece was so much about text, and texts that are important to us. (Zank)

Being responsible for these pages was "exciting but also nerve-wracking" for Zank. Some examples of these new documents created by the audience and read by the performers:

We the people are not corporations

We the People struggle together for equality for all

We the People are deeply connected

We the People deserve a Legislature that works

We the People value individual and community

We the People own our history and our future

We the People will never be perfect and unbiased

We the People need to be kinder to one another

We the People demand inclusivity

We the People welcome everyone and celebrate individuality

We the People are stronger than we think

We the People must never live in fear (*DocumentNation* video)



Fig. 8. The cast of *DocumentNation* read the audience-created “We the People” documents at the end of the performance. Photo courtesy of Kalle Westerling.

As these were being read, one of the ensemble members wrote the words “All people are created equal” onto Soriano’s pregnant belly. That image had been in Miller’s imagination

for some time; a promotional photo had been taken of those words on Soriano's belly in advance of the conference. During our last rehearsal before moving to the Mall, Miller incorporated the rest of the ensemble into the finale moment of writing those words on her body. Another performer in the cast objected to the finishing the performance with an image that was, in Miller's phrasing, "inscribing personhood on the unborn" (2015 Interview). Miller acknowledged that:

She had a good point, obviously. [. . .] It was, of course, problematic in all kinds of ways. Pregnant women's bodies are a minefield. And it was problematic having Mormon, tall, white Zach in the fulcrum position with all those texts [in the pre-show]. On the other hand, it also just felt like what a great, crackly image to bring out there. The problematics of it should just be there humming. (2015 interview).

When the objection was raised, however, we were in the midst of the final push to finalize the structure of the entire piece within a forty-five minute time window, and Miller felt he had to "shut it down" due to the time constraints (2015 interview). Soriano opted to stay out of the conversation, despite her body being the center of the controversy. "I remember thinking, 'Really? Is this really a problem?' [. . .] But I also wanted to respect other people's space to have their concern, and so I didn't really comment one way or another" (Soriano). The image stayed in the performance.



Fig. 9. A performer writes “All People are Created Equal” onto Christina Tsoules Soriano’s belly while Alicia Tafoya and Heidi Schmidt observe. Photo courtesy of Kalle Westerling.

Miller: “It was a classic moment we simply had no time to explore. I thought [the performer who objected] was actually true to herself by bringing it up, but she was also respectful to the reality of our situation by then stepping back” (2015 interview). In hindsight, Miller characterized it as

The danger moment of that entire process, within our work. We could have had any number of them. The whole notion of *DocumentNation* was, in a way,

privileging these white male documents, for the most part. Not that people couldn't go somewhere else with those, [and] I thought people subverted that in so many interesting ways. [. . .] And also partly it gets at the high wire act of devised work. With almost no preparation time, it can go to a place that is a crisis around representation, or issues around race or sexuality or faith. Surprising it doesn't happen more. I think partly the process I have actually allows for profound disagreement around politics or racial representations or . . . That was what was lurking in that moment with Christina's pregnant body. Introducing a pregnant woman – especially so pregnant – is stagecraft, it's manipulative. Of course, we do those things all the time because they're things that crackle. (Miller 2015 interview)

Audience Response

After the conference, ATHE leadership solicited feedback on the conference at large from those who attended. "In the ATHE conference surveys," Bill Doan told me, "the *DocumentNation* project was mentioned significantly by those who participated and those who braved the heat of the Mall, which we felt was a really good sign of the success of it." He continues:

The conference can become very diverse and spread out for people, and other than the keynote or the awards ceremony, there aren't a lot of really communal things that happen at the conference. You're broken up into focus groups and small groups. So *DocumentNation* added another communal element to that conference. We still had a keynote, we still had an awards ceremony, we still had

the big communal things, and this added another one which people seemed to remember and to value. Even amidst the heat and the other issues, it was like, wow, this was another all-ATHE event that was significant and important. For me, it was one of the highlights of my first conference as president. In fact, looking back over my presidency, *DocumentNation*, Tim's performance, Dael Orlandersmith and Bill Irwin are kind of the highlights of my presidency. But more than anything, when I looked at the feedback of the conference and then we talked about future conferences and things we learned and things we want to do again, that addition of another communal experience is something that the ATHE membership seems to want and appreciate, and we're always looking for new and creative ways to provide that. *DocumentNation* is a really good example of that. (Doan)

One of Soriano's former students, who was working in D.C. for a conservative senator, attended the performance on the Mall.

And I remember also just being like . . . this is good, this is what it's about. Politically, she may not agree with some of these things, but she's here, she's being respectful, she's being supportive. She is here in support of me and my doing this, but also in a very . . . she's part of something that we as American citizens have every right to do, which is to be in a public place, and in a peaceful way, sharing our concerns or beliefs about something. [. . .] I was glad she came. I was also really glad she could see that, "Hey, you're not my student anymore." I'm doing this with this professional organization, which is this sort of landmark

event of ATHE for the year. It felt also like this is what we do. This is what I care about, this is who I am, and now I can talk about this with you not from an instructive way, but more of a . . . There was no didactic quality to it. It felt just very like, “Hey, what did you experience?” So that was really cool. (Soriano)



Fig. 10. The cast and audience for *DocumentNation* after the performance. Photo courtesy of Kalle Westerling.

Conclusion

In addition to the ways *DocumentNation* deepened their teaching work, a handful of participants told me they were inspired to pursue devised work further as creators and performers. Alicia Tafoya told me that “it allowed me to go back and look at other things in my life that I could push – I gave myself more permission to push into that avant garde space. I think it’s opened a lot of . . . locks that I had put on myself” (Tafoya). Zach Sudbury mentioned a specific project that he’d had in mind for some time: “I’ve been trying to make it happen and I’ll

be drawing on [Miller's] books, and on him over Facebook, but primarily from those experiences in the workshop in order to lead this project" (Sudbury).

Shortly after *DocumentNation*, Jodi Jinks was supervising a group of students at Oklahoma State devising a piece titled *Oklahoma Voices*. The project's benefactor's "aim was to highlight freed slaves, and women, and Native Americans in Oklahoma. The people who have not had a voice" (Jinks). As the piece developed, one of the historical incidents included in the narrative was the Greenwood Race Riots of Tulsa in 1921, in which "hundreds of African Americans were murdered. Hundreds. The entire black community in Tulsa was torched" (Jinks). Jinks was working with the cast on how to stage this historical event, and noticed some issues arising among the students based on race and the representation of this moment; she recalled Miller's example as a facilitator willing to engage in dialogue about difficult topics.

We were looking at this, and doing some gesture sequences and working on some movement pieces, but what came up was that the African American students did not want to appear or play any sense of being victimized in this process. [. . .] And some of the white actors were getting impatient with some of the black actors who had these feelings coming up around this moment. So we had a real sit down, right then and there in rehearsal. And we took about an hour and talked about race. Historically, present day, and what was happening in the room right then. And that reminded me of Tim's work. That dialogue is always available. I went into this process knowing that racial relations, particularly in Oklahoma, are just not discussed. It's all a big dirty secret. And so it was a great opportunity to discuss race. I didn't know how it was going to

happen, other than my discussing it. But – boom! – in that particular rehearsal, it flared up and opened a really interesting dialogue. And that reminded me of Tim’s ability to talk about politics and to connect with us and for us to feel heard as performers. I think by the sheer act of having [the conversation], a lot of tension was resolved. So that was a very Tim Miller inspired moment. “Okay, let’s stop. There’s no agenda here.” I like to think I would have come up with that myself. [laughing] (Jinks)

The scene was eventually staged without matching the actor’s race to the character they played; all of the actors wore trenchcoats, hats, and other pieces so that the audience “didn’t know who was black, who was white, who was Native American” (Jinks). Race, then, became something the actors took on and off in order to engage with the story being told.

Jink continues:

One of my biggest takeaways from [*DocumentNation*] was watching Tim in the room. I don’t know when I’ve worked with someone who was so completely open and giving. And every single thing that was given, he found the positive in it. He let us all do exactly what we wanted to do, and express ourselves however we chose to do that. And I’m so appreciative of his confidence in his abandonment. He’s constantly abandoning his ideas and embracing everybody else’s and whatever it is, it is. If he was nervous about it, I didn’t know. I just found him to be unbelievably gracious and so present. [. . .] I took away this idea of how I felt as a performer. I felt . . . *held*. In a way that I don’t feel I held my students – not quite like that. Of course, we were all adults, and that’s a very

different dynamic. But I aspire now to do that. To really be present. It takes so much energy, and [Tim] gave it everything. He gave us everything. (Jinks)



Fig. 11. Tim Miller watches the performance of *DocumentNation*. Photo courtesy of Kalle Westerling.

DocumentNation provided a significant challenge to Miller and the performers; the outdoor location in a public space presented logistical complications not usually found in Miller's week-long workshops, while the intense heat on the Mall tested the endurance of both the performers and the audience. The extremely compressed time frame also increased the

degree of difficulty, and the public performance for colleagues and potential employers at the end of those two and a half days intensified the stakes of the creation process.

Despite these challenges, those I interviewed (including Miller, Doan, and several performers) all counted the project a success, and the responses from ATHE surveys indicate the audience agreed. The location on the National Mall, with its rich history and symbolic resonance, along with the conference's "Performance as/is Civic Engagement" theme, afforded a unique opportunity for the performers to engage with the connections between the stories in their own bodies and in the body politic, and interweave personal memoir with the collective histories represented by the "founding documents" that inspired the performances.

Chapter 4 details a project with a significantly different workshop duration; while *DocumentNation* was created over the course of days, *Litmus* at the University of Colorado Boulder was created over several weeks. Both projects ended in public performances that affected the process of creation, and both projects were influenced by the immediacy of both *here* and the *now*. *Litmus* was created in the final days of the 2012 presidential election on a swing state college campus.

Chapter 4

***Litmus* at the University of Colorado Boulder**

Tim Miller was invited to the University of Colorado Boulder as the 2012-13 Roe Green Visiting Theatre Artist (an annual guest artist position named after the CU-Boulder alumna who sponsors it). The fall 2012 project would be a month-long residency, during which Miller and a cast of students would devise a performance to be presented as part of the Theatre & Dance Department's academic performance season. The production, titled *Litmus*, was scheduled to be performed the last weekend in October, less than two weeks before the 2012 presidential election, in "the swingiest of swing states," as Miller phrased it. The project would provide a unique opportunity for students to engage with "the body politic and the politics that live in our bodies. [. . .] In spite of the endless political commercials in this swingiest of swing states that try to make us believe in this rigid red state/blue state binary – our social texts are really more fluid and live in our bodies, families and personal narratives" (Miller, "Director's Note").

The performance that resulted was presented October 24-28, 2012, in the Loft Theatre, a black box space (arranged in an arena configuration for this production) with roughly one hundred seats. *Litmus* was comprised of approximately twenty vignettes, each created and directed by one of the participants, interspersed with a handful of transitional or framing pieces involving the full cast. Topics of the performance included the looming election, resistance to labels assigned by society (gendered, racial, sexual, and political), relationship struggles, fear of death, and the uncomfortable prevalence of technology.



Fig. 12. The cast of *Litmus*. Photo courtesy of the University of Colorado Boulder Department of Theatre & Dance.

Two of the primary differences between *Litmus* and other workshops Miller facilitates around the country are the extended timeline for the rehearsal/workshop process and the placement of *Litmus* as part of the Theatre & Dance department's performance season at the University of Colorado Boulder. As previously noted, there's really no such thing as a "standard" Miller workshop, but it is fair to say that the majority of them happen over a far more condensed timeline than *Litmus* and they do not generally result in a ticketed performance marketed as part of the department's performance season.

The placement of *Litmus* in the season also created certain expectations regarding the technical elements of performance, marketing and PR, and box office. Elements had to be planned in advance in ways that challenged the immediacy Miller prizes about performance art.

This case study explores how the immediacy and minimalism of Miller's usual methods were implemented and altered as part of this project; engages with the project's relationship to department curriculum that varies from other Miller residencies; and documents the process from the perspective of the students involved.



Fig. 13. The cast of *Litmus*. Photo courtesy of the University of Colorado Boulder Department of Theatre & Dance.

Chapter Methodology

In my investigation of *Litmus* as a case study, I conducted eighteen interviews (two with Tim Miller, one with faculty member Tamara Meneghini, and individual interviews with fifteen students who participated in *Litmus*, equaling 75% of the cast). The majority of these interviews were conducted in March and April 2014, approximately eighteen months after *Litmus*. All students were offered the option of anonymity; none requested it, so all names cited in this

chapter are their own. Additional resources include my own participation in a mini-workshop Miller conducted on campus at CU-Boulder six months in advance of *Litmus*; attendance at a performance of *Litmus* in October 2012; the run script from the production; attendance at Miller's performance of *Glory Box* as part of his CU-Boulder residency; a 2014 ATHE conference panel on including devised work as part of academic performance seasons (recorded with permission of the panelists); and eighty-two anonymized student papers responding to *Litmus*. In total, I transcribed thirteen hours, forty-two minutes of audio (107,450 words) as the primary material for this chapter.

Immediacy and Minimalism in *Litmus*

Miller's prompts and process are intended to help workshop participants tap into what is most urgent and present in their own lives, and *Litmus* was no exception. The timing and location, however, afforded an opportunity to focus the project thematically and for the participants to mine the realities of student life in the midst of a highly contested election. In a 2014 conference panel, Miller elaborated on the intent of the project and the title, *Litmus*.

We intentionally chose the month leading up to the last presidential election in what seemed to be a super swing state – Colorado – which ended up being quite a blue state, as it turned out. But it was a very intense time to be doing a piece about litmus, trafficking in political culture, their lives, how it spoke to them, how the election was moving through their bodies. A piece that's about what was happening in our national psyche at that time. (qtd. in Coleman et al.)

Conceptually, *Litmus* also adopted a litmus color scheme; an acid will turn litmus paper red and a base will turn it blue, offering a correlation to political designations of red states and blue

states. This thematic connection between the timing of the production and the election activities on campus was not enforced within the rehearsal room; Miller included many performance creation prompts unconnected to the election or politics. Several students entered the rehearsal room with some level of trepidation about the political focus, however. Eddy Jordan felt “pretty politically . . . uh . . . uninformed” at the beginning of the process, and “was really concerned that this was all gonna be like, ‘Get up there for three minutes and monologue about [politics.]’ ‘What are the topics that define your political fingerprint?’ And I was like, ‘I have no idea.’ I’m almost lukewarm” (Jordan). Tanner Cahoon had similar hesitations regarding creating election specific work: “I expected it to be more like, ‘Oh man, we’re going to create some crazy piece about the election that’s gonna happen this year,’ [but] it turned out to be more personal, and more like share your own story, and how does everything connect” (Cahoon). Andryn Arithson commented that “the whole show didn’t end up being about the election – it was there, but it wasn’t as big a part of it as we thought it might be” (Arithson). Bernadette Sefic agreed that “most of the show wasn’t about that. Which is funny, because . . . I think [it’s] the price you pay when you have to come up with a concept before you even start. Could [Tim] have geared it toward that? Possibly. I think it turned out better that he didn’t” (Sefic).

Sefic’s reference to the need to establish a concept early is directly related to *Litmus*’s placement in the performance season and the length of the process, which applies to the advance preparation time as much as to the rehearsal period. Meneghini commented:

Positioning ourselves that we were going to do a “production” implied that we had to have all of these elements that Tim’s work doesn’t necessarily need –

that's not what his work is about. It's really the power of the story rather than the power of the production. And it ended up being just fine, but there were some communication challenges in the beginning. We probably could have done a better job educating our colleagues about the process. (Meneghini)

One of these elements is a title, which was decided on by Miller and department chair Bud Coleman via several email conversations and in response to requests from the department's PR and marketing arm (Coleman et al.). In addition to Miller and the performers (who were cast through an audition process rather than simply signing up), the *Litmus* creative team included two assistant directors, a lighting designer, a stage manager, assistant stage manager, and wardrobe run crew.

During the rehearsal period, one of the students developed a piece involving full nudity, which required handling in a different way because it was being marketed to a more general audience. "If there's gonna be a weeny onstage, you have to warn people," Miller explained (2012 interview). He continues:

It also has to be talked about at the production meeting. At no level was it ever discouraged at any point, and it's going to be one of the most beautiful moments in the piece. [. . .] But if Tony had a lot more time, even if he'd put it in a proposal, there could have been any number of places where someone might have troubled it, or he might have troubled it himself, because we're our own worst censors, always. So the speed thing, it's a huge asset. (Miller, 2012 interview)

The nudity also affected the department's approach to archiving the performance. Tony Dostert, the student who performed nude for part of his piece, described the process of negotiating the best way to handle the nudity in context of archival photography:

We talked about how empowering and also beautiful bare skin can be under stage light. And how both for my portfolio, and also for the lighting designer student, for his portfolio, how that was something that – if we wanted to – would be really important, would be something to really cherish. And also it was something where we both had to agree that if one of us was going to have a picture, the other one was going to have a picture. [. . .] I think we ended up having a few photos taken, but also because of the logistics of the university potentially having pictures of students in the nude, or compromising pictures, I believe we were told that if we wanted to take them with our private cameras, that's how they would exist, whereas university cameras would not keep that on film just for protection of students, protection of the university, all that fun logistical stuff that happens. (Dostert)

The addition of technical elements also provided some opportunities not always available to Miller. The production played with red and blue colors (in light, in costuming, etc.) as a way to highlight the red state/blue state dynamic of the election and the final performance incorporated a map gobo, which created a map of the United States on the floor in light. This light map became an ensemble vignette around places of origin and connected to another solo vignette about the assumptions we make about people based on where they're from.

Litmus was developed over a longer time span than is usual for Miller, but the process was still short by most production standards. Meneghini joked about the discrepancy between the department's usual process and Miller's:

Four weeks – that was actually long for him. And we told him, we want you to devise a piece that is part of our season. What is the longest amount of time you can do it? He said that repeatedly through the process, “Oh my god, this is long for me.” He was so funny. “My god, I don’t know, four weeks, that’s a long time.” And Bud [Coleman] and I were, “Four weeks! That’s not very long!” I think it was challenging for him. He’s used to opening up something that’s fresh. It’s fresh, and it happens, and then it’s over with. But he had to sustain it. And so it was really interesting to see him in the rehearsal room with these students, coming up with ways, in the process, on his end as a teacher that he hadn’t done before. [. . .] I think it was torture for him. [laughing] I think Tim grew from working here for that long period of time. [pause] It was a challenge for him, and it was fun to see him challenge them, but also be challenged himself. (Meneghini)

Miller's commentary on the length of the rehearsal/development process was in a similar vein: “For them it’s the fastest thing they’ve ever done. For me, I feel like I’ve got lots of breathing space” (2012 interview). He continues:

For me, it’s just this opportunity to have sidebars. [. . .] I don’t [usually] have the luxury of screwing up a day. It’s one of the things – I’m enjoying [*Litmus*] so much, just to have . . . it’s not really four times as much time as I’m used to, but

it's three times as much. We have three full weeks to explore, to try things, to kind of build the piece more slowly. Not so much triage. (Miller, 2012 interview)

Curriculum Considerations

Tamara Meneghini, who coordinated Miller's residency at CU-Boulder, told me that the faculty were explicitly looking to supplement curriculum. "When we look at the Roe Green artist, we're looking at things the students haven't had in their tenure here. So we think in terms of cycles. They'd done period stuff, they'd done musicals, but they hadn't done a lot of devising" (Meneghini). Miller's invitation, then, was to teach the process of devising within the laboratory of a season production. Miller commented on the necessity of learning by doing in the 2014 ATHE conference panel on devised work in academic seasons:

To have never done an intensive devised process means they actually don't know how it's done: what to do, what the challenges are, what's really scary about it. To start rehearsal three weeks, four weeks, two weeks from opening night where a piece is already titled, promoted, posters up, and not one thing exists of it yet [general laughter], which to me is the distillation down of the creative challenge. Diving into the abyss of that. And so I think it gives them a moment of that beautiful terror, excitement, and permission that we're gonna make this happen, we can make this. This is going to be OUR piece. That I think is really extraordinary. Also to make theatre about what is happening right now in my life, in my bed, on my Facebook page, in the world. (qtd. in Coleman et al.)

Litmus's inclusion in the season also means that the student practitioners who created the performance were not the only ones whose learning process was impacted. Many students

enrolled in “Introduction to Theatre” courses at CU-Boulder were required to attend the production for course credit, and *Litmus* provided an opportunity to introduce non-traditional creation processes to students not majoring in theatre. Later in this chapter I will explore how *Litmus* changed my own curricular decisions regarding a section of “Introduction to Theatre” I taught that semester and my students’ reactions to the performance.

In many institutions, opportunities to expose students and faculty not connected to theatre and performance programs to devised work are rare (dance programs are a notable exception). In the aforementioned ATHE panel, Holly Hughes noted the resistance she often feels in her own institution to committing department resources to devised projects. “It exists, but it’s definitely a second class citizen because it’s not on the main stage [. . .] The fear is that it’s going to be bad work. But how many student Shakespeare productions are still going on? They *can* be great, but often . . .” she trails off (qtd. in Coleman et al.). Miller, however, has noticed a shift in that mindset; in our 2012 interview (during the *Litmus* rehearsal process), he observed that these longer residencies are becoming more common for him, though they are still the exception, not the rule.

This kind of process, this way of working, has gotten much more mainstreamed, especially into higher education. I like plays, I like musicals. I don’t think they’re oppositional, I think they work together really interestingly. But it’s not surprising that this year for the first time, within the university context, that I’m being invited to do this as part of the season [at CU-Boulder and Wake Forest.] So that, to me, is really promising. Our theatre in higher education is just getting more interesting. (2012 interview)

This inter-relationship between devised work and the more mainstream plays and musicals was further explored in the previously mentioned ATHE panel. Holly Hughes and Tim Miller both remarked on the ability of devised theatre work to address the needs of students often left out or left behind in more traditional scripted work. Hughes: “They never get cast. Most of them women, some people of color, anybody who weighs more than a hundred pounds. They’re never gonna get cast, so they can come with me [. . .]. And there were some people who were tired of playing the ingénue. ‘Let me out of this, I’d like to do something else’” (qtd. in Coleman et al.). Miller followed up with his preference for the “Island of Misfit Toys.”

Those are my people, it’s the cast I want. It’s also the cast I get [laughter] for all of the reasons that Holly just said, but it also allows those beautiful misfit toys to blossom. Eddy, who was a [sophomore] in *Litmus*: super amazing quirky gangly gorgeous freak boy, who’s now become one of your most valued actors because as he let us, the audience, into the beautiful oasis of vaginas; it actually allowed his castability, because suddenly, my god, this kid is incredible. What a beautiful, wild, risk-taking actor he is as well. It’s not oppositional, actually. It’s in beautiful conversation with the rest of the season. The devised work may unleash their performance chi to then be of profound service in other places, in the musical, in Shakespeare. Especially in Shakespeare, because this kind of work immediately is so connected to Shakespeare performance. If you’ve never done a solo monologue around yourself, how can you possibly do Edmund’s “stand up for bastards”? You simply have no clue how to do it. If you’ve stood up for your *own*

bastard in your *own* work, you're ready to take on Edmund. (qtd. in Coleman et al.)

Preparation for Miller's Residency and Casting Process

The primary faculty liaison for the CU-Boulder project was Assistant Professor of Theatre, Tamara Meneghini, who was first introduced to Miller a few years before at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. "I was teaching voice and movement, and I thought it [Miller's workshop process] looked really interesting as a way, in the voice studio, in the movement studio, to help the students find their inner voice, their inner body, that inner language that hadn't come out yet" (Meneghini). A few years later, after she joined CU-Boulder's acting faculty, she remembered her positive response to Miller's work when the department was evaluating potential guests for the Roe Green Visiting Artist slot.

Litmus was scheduled for six performances in late October 2012, with rehearsals for the three-four weeks prior to those dates. Because of the production's inclusion in the academic performance season, students auditioned for *Litmus* along with the other productions happening that semester. In an effort to familiarize students with Miller as an artist and with his performance creation process, he was invited to campus in March 2012. Over this short visit, Miller spoke to a few classes and conducted a mini-workshop with students in Meneghini's upper level acting course. "We've done that with a few of the Roe Green artists," Meneghini told me. "We've created opportunities for them to come in the spring before they come in for the fall. Sort of introduce them, open up the doors" (Meneghini). Several of the students who ended up creating *Litmus* with Miller were first introduced to him during this brief spring workshop.

Miller's mini-workshop was held in Meneghini's upper level acting class, Studio 4, and the students enrolled in that course made up the majority of the group. Participation was open to any interested students, however, and several other CU students accepted the invitation, myself included. Brad Steinmeyer also joined the class for the day, partially as a result of meeting Miller in the building before the March mini-workshop. "He saw me rehearsing in the lobby and we talked a bit. I had no idea who he was or what he was doing, but we just talked briefly. He commented on my bright orange Converse that I was wearing. That became a big thing, especially during the rehearsal process of *Litmus*. He talked a lot about those. I still have them, they're my favorite shoes" (Steinmeyer). Daniel Leonard, a Studio 4 student who was also in the *Litmus* cast, remembered Steinmeyer's orange shoes (and Miller's notice of them) as well:

That's something I really liked about Tim. Because he'd pick out . . . I remember how welcoming he made the room. And I know that sounds silly, but it is one of those things that immediately came across from him as an artist. People would walk into the room and he would make them instantly feel comfortable with themselves. [. . .] There was just a handful there [during the March workshop] who weren't in the class with us, and he picked up on the orange shoes and he made it a great thing about Bradley, and it was great. He's very good at finding small ways to empower people. [. . .] It's crucial to the work we create. (Leonard)

The workshop consisted of an abbreviated progression through many of Miller's first day exercises. The group did some warm up activities, flash performances, and Miller walked the group through some memory exercises, locating a moment of claiming individual authority.

Alex Reed recalled a moment when “we were supposed to think of a person who is dead that we would really like to talk to and what we would like to say to them [. . .] We all started speaking very quietly to ourselves, and I was talking about John Lennon’s assassination, and it was this very moving kind of moment” (Reed).

Once the students had each located the moment they wanted to present, they were asked to find a gesture or brief movement and share it with the group. Small groups were formed, and each student was asked to compose seven lines of text and to direct their fellow performers, but not to over-explain their narrative. Alex Reed told a story about the day he told his parents he no longer identified as a Christian.

I told Alison to hover around me and say out loud the things a seventeen-year-old boy would be worried about. And she ended up saying, “Hackey sacks! Inappropriate erections!” and things like that. And I said [to Amber, the other person in my group], “I’m going to come up to you and say something really shocking, and you just have to act shocked.” And that was all the direction I gave to my group members. And so the piece I did was, and this was the real event when I told my parents I was not a Christian. Different from telling them I was an atheist, but . . . I woke up on a Sunday morning, and I was super tired, and something just snapped inside me and like “I don’t want to go to church today. I should tell them that I’m not a Christian anymore.” So I got up, and Alison followed me as I climbed the metaphorical stairs, and I found my mom, and I said, “Mom, I am not a Christian.” Amber acts shocked, and I told Alison to be quiet in that moment, too. And there was a really shocked moment in the whole

group, in the audience. And then I turned around, and I said, “And then I went downstairs, and I went to bed.” And people thought that was really funny. The nonchalant-ness of it. (Reed)

Graduate student Andryn Arithson “talked about falling in love with my partner,” who is transgender, and her text played with the gender of different pronouns before landing on “you” as the one of most significance.

That was the first queer relationship that I had ever been in, and that process of falling in love made me . . . it really, I guess, brought back, or brought up the feelings of the way that I see gender as a very fluid thing. Because I had some hesitation around being in a queer relationship, but then once I let that go it just felt so natural and good. And I think I talked about how it felt like boysenberry syrup [laughs]. It tasted like boysenberry syrup. It was all the sweet without the sticky, because my partner hates it when you get sticky. [. . .] This was . . . it really allowed me to express that experience of falling in love in a very rich way. I think Tim described it as Whitman-esque, the way that I came up with sort of a poem about that. (Arithson)

Miller was unable to come to Boulder for the audition process in late August, so casting for *Litmus* was handled by Meneghini and department chair Bud Coleman. Meneghini “talked a lot with Tim [. . .] about numbers, like how many he could work with. Of course with the Roe Green Artist, [we want] as many of our students as possible to be exposed to that person. So we asked him how many would you be willing . . . ? And he was very flexible: [. . .] ‘The more the merrier.’” The department was also producing Michael Frayn’s *Noises Off* that semester,

and casting negotiations and considerations revolved around balancing the needs of these two productions with the educational benefits to the students. “When it comes right down to it, it is an educational experience,” Meneghini told me.

We’re conducting ourselves as professionally as possible, the stage managers are following Equity guidelines, etc. But when it comes right down to it, you as a director, or you as a faculty liaison, you’re responsible for making sure that these students have an experience where they learn something. And so a lot of what I was thinking as we were casting is what are they going to get? What is this student going to get out of it? (Meneghini)

After the general auditions for all of the fall productions, students being called back for *Litmus* were asked to prepare a short monologue telling a story from their own lives. Several students commented on being surprised or unsure of themselves when asked to tell a personal story for the callback process: “it was a little weird to me because I’ve never done that before”; “it was a little nerve-wracking going in and talking about something personal”; “oh my god I was so stressed out. What do I write about? What do I write about?” (King; Spector; Steinmeyer).

The stories told as part of the audition process included a lot of comedy, but also some fairly serious topics. Andrew Crawford “told a story about a girl that I had a crush on in the seventh grade and how I went up to her and her pack of friends and said, ‘Will you go out with me?’ and I had a rejection. It was rough, but it was a good story to tell and it got me cast” (Crawford). Tony Dostert talked about falling in love with another boy for the first time – at a Bible camp. “I’d always talked to my friends about being gay, but it was interesting because [the audition] was one of the first times I’d really talked about that in a theatrical manner” (Dostert).

Brad Steinmeyer used his coming out story: “when I came out to my dad, he just told me that was wonderful” (Steinmeyer). Sydney Bogatz confessed to lying about being from Las Vegas in frustration at the responses she often gets: “They say, ‘oh, is your mom a stripper? Does your dad own a casino?’” (Bogatz). Alex Reed’s callback monologue opened with him “getting hit on the back of the head with a ball and falling face first on the floor.” He had bounced between two worlds in high school: the gym class where he was bullied, and the theatre where he operated the spotlight for musicals. “I was the last cue of the show to turn off the spotlight, and it almost felt like it triggered the applause” (Reed).

Bernadette Sefic’s callback monologue also involved bullying. She had attended a small, private school on full scholarship alongside the children of fairly wealthy families. The experience overall was very positive (“I actually still work there now”), but Sefic was regularly targeted by one particular student as a fourth grader. After telling her grandmother about an incident through tears in the car afterward, Sefic’s grandmother gave her some advice.

She said, “the next time [she] touches you, you turn to her and you say, “Don’t ever touch me again, or I’ll knock your pretty little teeth down your fucking throat.” And so I did. I went to school, and it was like three days later. [. . .] They were kind of circling me, and she was bullying me, and she ends up doing this weird middle school thing, she thumps me on the head. So I turn around to her and I say it. [. . .] She went crying to her mom, who went crying to the dean, who ended up calling all the parents in and ended up settling it with me going to violence counseling, which was fantastic because Debbie was the violence

counselor, and she knew all along about what a little brat [she] was. And so all I got to do during violence counseling was my homework and coloring. (Sefic)

Sergio King had done a high school mission trip to an orphanage in El Salvador, and told a story about a morning when his youth pastor asked for four strong men for a particular project, and chose Sergio as one of them.

He takes us around to the back of the orphanage and it's just this wall, and you could see these spigots, and it drained into this sewage ditch. So it was just a trench of sewage. And it was blocked. [. . .] We start shoveling, start unclogging it, and we're making . . . we're standing . . . There's the trench, and we're standing on either side of the trench trying to make piles and stuff. And my pile's getting pretty big, and I get a lot of it with my shovel and scoop it down, and it just sprays right into my face. And like a little bit touches my lip, and I was like, "I'm done. I'm done. I can't, I can't, I can't do this." And that story showed me that you have to go through literal shit sometimes to find the good in life.

Because after we did that we hung out with the kids and it was like . . . it was night and day. Yes, it was terrible working in the sewage, but at the end of the day getting to spend time with the kids and playing soccer, it was really . . . it was worth it. It was worth it. (King)

Sophomore Eddy Jordan's mother had been the primary source of religion in his life, and he had always appreciated the community that religious connection provided. As he got older, however, he started becoming more aware of the ways his queer friends felt persecuted by his church, and the disconnect between those positive and negative reactions

kinda didn't make sense to me. And then my mom got sick and she later passed away from breast cancer in 2006. [. . .] It really gave me removal from religion. It was never this vengeance, "Why would God do this?" But it was more of just . . . that force that had been enforcing it was gone. So I had time to kind of step back and look at it more. (Jordan)

The ensemble also included two graduate students who were asked to serve as assistant directors for *Litmus*. Andryn Arithson was completing both an MBA and a Theatre MA at CU; Karen Dabney was a PhD student in the Department of Theatre & Dance. Dabney "went in with a certain level of expectations about what my role would be," based on her previous directing and assistant directing experience (Dabney Interview). Miller's process, however, required a reformulation of those expectations. Both assistant directors performed as part of the ensemble and participated in all of the workshop activities throughout the rehearsal process. Dabney noted that participation complicates a traditional assistant director role: "you can't really do both – you can't be the outside observer eye and give feedback, and be in the scene" (Dabney Interview). In this process, the assistant directors' role was "more to model by example in the ensemble, to help – when focus was needed – to help bring focus" (Dabney Interview). Both also gave occasional feedback to Miller about how the other performers were doing, where his attention might be most needed, "or what issues they were dealing with, etc." (Dabney Interview). Arithson "felt like a member of the ensemble, most of the time. I didn't feel a huge divide between myself and the other performers" (Arithson). Undergraduate student Bernadette Sefic described the role of the assistant directors as a sort of middle ground between the undergrads and Miller: "It's one thing to work with Tim, but he's working with

everyone. But to get personal attention from someone who's done devised [work] before and is much more educated in the art than I am, but also is not Tim – this middle ground. I loved that" (Sefic).

The Rehearsal Process

Early *Litmus* rehearsals utilized many of the same strategies, prompts, and exercises as other workshops: flash performances, holding hands to break down barriers around physical contact, memory prompts around confronting authority, and body mapping. Response to these exercises from the students who participated seemed to be mixed; for the most part, the students I spoke with who had previous experience with devised theatre, autobiographical performance, or with Tim Miller's career and working methods were the most excited about and open to the process from the beginning. Assistant director Andryn Arithson, for example, signed up for Miller's March mini-workshop because she "knew it was an opportunity not to be missed. As a queer artist, I had heard of him being in the NEA Four, and I just couldn't miss it" (Arithson). After that mini-workshop, she signed up for *DocumentNation* on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. (see Chapter 3). This prior experience with Miller helped her go into the *Litmus* process without having overly prepared what she wanted to perform: "I knew that it would take shape in the process. To go in with too much prepared would have spoiled it for me. When you get attached to an idea, sometimes it's hard to move on" (Arithson). Brad Steinmeyer had worked with some queer youth groups as a high school student, and felt comfortable talking about "our lives, our identities, our sexuality, our bodies, our issues" as a result. "I was ready for it every day. I was excited to be there and just go through . . . unload what we went through each day, and just have fun and express ourselves" (Steinmeyer). As the

process got underway, he found it “very rigorous and very exciting” to create new work every day, though it was also “taxing on me at times. ‘What am I gonna do today? I don’t know what I’m gonna perform.’ But fortunately, Tim also gave us prompts, too, which really helped inspire things, and there’s so much material to pull from in one’s own life. And he’s been doing this for years now and he just knows these inspiring prompts that pull things out of people” (Steinmeyer).

A large proportion of the students I spoke with acknowledged having little or no experience with devised theatre or with autobiographical performance. For some, this was a non-issue. Eddy Jordan, a sophomore the year *Litmus* was performed, joked afterward that because this was his first CU production, he “didn’t really appreciate the novelty of it much. I thought maybe this was kind of normal to do theatre this way” (Jordan). After the fake orgasm flash performance during the first day of rehearsal, Tanner Cahoon “was like, ‘What the hell? Is this even . . . ? It’s awesome, it’s hilarious, I’m being theatrical, that’s for sure, but how is this going to translate into something people will pay for?’ So there was definitely a confusion. This is cool, but is this a show?” (Cahoon). Despite his early “confusion,” Cahoon never saw it as a barrier. “I trusted that it was all going to come together. [. . .] I trusted that he knew what he was doing, he was experienced, that he did this all the time. I could tell it was going to work. But yeah, I had not the slightest clue” (Cahoon).

Other students admitted starting the process with some resistance. Generally, with Miller’s one week residencies, participating students self-select by signing up for the workshop. *Litmus*’s inclusion in the season and the implementation of an audition process changed that dynamic; rather than signing up for a workshop, they were cast in *Litmus* by faculty. This

introduced the possibility of student disappointment which often accompanies the posting or announcement of a cast list. Sarah Adler told me about being deeply resistant to the process in the beginning, partially because she “wanted to do *Noises Off*. I was like, ‘I am perfect for *Noises Off*,’ and I did not get in to *Noises Off*” (Adler). Adler also credits her resistance to having an incomplete understanding of what the process would be (“I just knew that some guy was going to make me talk about my life, and I was not appreciating it. [laughs] I didn’t know he was a big deal. Shoulda done some research” [Adler]) and to a discomfort with performing personal narrative. “At first [theatre] was about avoiding myself and [*Litmus*] was the first time that I really had to be me on stage, so that was new. And scary. I was super resistant at the beginning of rehearsal, I was just Re. Sis. Tant.” (Adler). The discomfort continued for her as the rehearsals progressed:

I would just start to feel comfortable and then he’d ask me to talk about something else. It was really quick. Part of what was so scary was not just that it was our own lives, but that we got a very minimal amount of time. So he would say something, say a couple of things to us, be talking to us, and then he would be like, “Okay, now MAKE it.” And we would have three partners and we would create a piece, a two minute piece, and we’d have five minutes to create it. So feeling first like you had to reveal something vulnerable, or feeling in a vulnerable place because you’re doing your own material and your own life and putting it in front of people, but also feeling like you weren’t getting to nitpick it, and perfect it, and show yourself exactly how you want to be shown, made it . . . that was hard. But also, is the only way it was possible to get anything real from

the material. Because I didn't have time, or we didn't have time to try to hide it, or trim it. It just had to be raw. (Adler)

Bernadette Sefic had done some writing and directing in high school, but had “never participated in anything like [. . .] Tim Miller's kind of devised” (Sefic). I asked if she knew anything about Tim Miller when she auditioned for the piece. “Zero. Which is so funny, because I brag about it all the time now. But I had no idea.” She remembers “being excited, but not understanding everything. [. . .] We were all gung-ho about pretending to walk on glass and having an orgasm at the same time. It was more like holding hands for four hours. It's like, ‘I don't want to hold your hands anymore!’” (Sefic). She is referring to Miller's prolific use of hand holding among the ensemble to introduce and normalize physical contact during introductions and at the end of rehearsal while the group discusses what was created that evening. Meneghini, who was present for most of the rehearsals as faculty advisor, noticed the occasional resistance from the cast to this particular Miller strategy: “I saw it as creating the ground by which they could play. And I think it drove them nuts, but it really was the foundation for things. I think in some way, they thought, ‘If we can stand here this long and hold hands, then we can share these stories.’ I think that was valuable” (Meneghini).

Tanner Cahoon credits these end of rehearsal conversations with contributing significantly to the overall success of the production: “We always had a sit down at the end of rehearsal where we'd circle up for an hour and talk about what happened in the rehearsal. And that's how I think a lot of the show ended up actually emerging is each other's feedback, consistently in the end of each rehearsal” (Cahoon). Meneghini continues:

The discussions that we had were really rich, and it opened a lot of doors. They usually happened towards the end of a rehearsal, and they would be long. But these magical things would happen the day they came back, and they'd have these profound things [to say]. [. . .] I think how he laid the groundwork, particularly with those long discussions, set it up that this is *our* workshop, this is when we're developing the script, so you've got to bring something to the table.

(Meneghini, my emphasis)

Sarah Adler told me that these conversations were never negative. "It was never like, 'I didn't like this, you shouldn't have done this.' It was like, 'This word . . . was powerful'" (Adler). She also found equal parts amusement and confusion in Miller's tendency to zero in on a single image or detail from a particular piece that day:

I was talking about my weight, and my experience with whether to diet or whatever when I was younger. Somehow I set it up that I made the choice to eat the celery stick because I was buying into this idea of what I was supposed to look like. All he would talk about for like A WEEK is he would bring it back to the celery stick. He couldn't get enough of it.

She also described a poem Tanner Cahoon improvised about his heart in response to the body mapping exercise, and contrasts the ensemble reaction with Miller's:

We were like "That's genius! How do you just, on the fly, come up with this word slam poetry?" All [Tim] mentioned was that when [Tanner] opened his arms at one point, he just looked so graceful. [. . .] And he *did* look graceful, it was true, but we were so . . . so used to seeing the big picture, the whole thing. But [Tim]

would just somehow pick out these moments, or these images, and see the power in them. And I mean . . . sometimes it sounded crazy, we're like "You've been talking about the celery stick for twenty minutes, and Tanner's graceful body!" And we'd leave and we'd just be like "WHAT is he talking about?" We just didn't get it, we had no idea what we were even *in*, we didn't know what we were doing. We just knew it was called *Litmus*, we didn't know *what* was going on. But he would be like, "*that* moment, more of that." And by the end, we had these magical creations that were beautiful, they were really beautiful, and it was because [Miller] would get stuck on one little thing. I never went back to the celery stick, which I'm sure was very disappointing for him. [laughs] (Adler)

As Sefic spent more time getting to know Miller and his process, and "seeing all the aspects coming together at the same time," she also came to appreciate what the hand holding and lengthy discussions accomplished in terms of the process. "I think it was the first time I was able to analyze the importance of the process of theatre, not just the final product. I don't know if I would have been able to do this show if I didn't hold hands with them four hours every night" (Sefic). I asked her what holding hands actually did accomplish for her, and she responded, "trust. It was a forced closeness that became a real closeness" (Sefic).

Sefic was not the only student who commented on the trust that was built quickly among the ensemble. Sydney Bogatz remembers "Tim talking to all of us, and saying that this is really an ensemble piece, and we have to get to know everyone, and we have to trust everyone. It was not easy. We had to open up to – I know more about those people than I know about some of my friends, and I had known them for a week" (Bogatz). Eddy Jordan "was so

appreciative of how the first couple of weeks were really getting to know each other, ‘cause I needed that so much” (Jordan). Stephanie Spector agreed: “We recognized the fact that we were going to share some pretty intimate stories with each other within the first two weeks. [. . .] Right off the bat we were delving into deep stuff. There wasn’t any hiding from that. So that was really cool” (Spector). Sergio King admired the “bravery of the other actors,” and credits Miller with creating a space in which that could happen. “I wouldn’t have told anything if people didn’t open up. I would have stayed in my shell [. . .] We wouldn’t have been as truthful as we were if it hadn’t been for Tim’s direction in creating us as a really close ensemble” (King).

The importance of ensemble building became especially clear as one student opted to incorporate full nudity into his own vignette, and one of the group moments evolved to include performers in partial dress. Adler commented on how “everybody started to find this comfort with each other, and this safety. I mean at one point we were all in our underwear for a scene. I have never before and not since been part of an ensemble that was so, that felt so safe. Tim really . . . I’m not sure how he did it. But somehow he created an environment in which that flourished” (Adler). Sefic agreed, “when Tony finally had to be naked, or when I finally had to be in my underwear, it wasn’t that we decided to be in our underwear and I had to spend the next week coming to terms with that, or being like, ‘Okay, I gotta trust these people.’ It was already there, and I was like, ‘Of course’” (Sefic).

Playing Records

Daniel Leonard told me that “the things that stand out,” in his memory, “are the things that didn’t end up in the performance, [. . .] all of the perfect little moments, two second moments that happened that were just gone forever. And *that* was what was great. That’s as

live as theatre gets” (Leonard). As previously mentioned, *Litmus* provided Miller an “opportunity to have sidebars. [. . .] We have three full weeks to explore, to try things” (2012 interview). One of the “sidebars” Miller played with was an exercise involving record players that he was originally hoping to include in the performance. “These undergrads, they’re still . . . a good half of them grew up around record players in the nineties. They’re all born between ’90 and ’94, and record players were still in people’s houses. [. . .] But some of them, probably half of them have literally never put a vinyl record on” (Miller, 2012 interview). Each student was asked to bring a vinyl record to rehearsal containing a piece of music that meant something to them. “They related to the music, found it in their body, and just told a little story. They almost all were about family. And it was just exquisite. I thought, man. This is such a really interesting . . . having any kind of extended process to introduce how music moves through our memory of family, especially of ancestors, was really beautiful” (2012 interview).

Miller was surprised and delighted to know that Eddy Jordan “lives for Artie Shaw, what an amazing thing to know about him” and that it’s Bernadette Sefic’s favorite music, too. “There’s suddenly this funny kinship between them. So just to have that knowledge of them from this structure I’ve never done before” (2012 interview). Stephanie Spector brought “Thunder Road,” by Bruce Springsteen, “because Bruce Springsteen is my mom’s favorite artist. And I remember her singing that to me on the day my grandmother died” (Spector). Andryn brought Whitney Houston’s “How Will I Know?” “It was very 1990, 8 years old . . . I don’t know when that song came out, but that’s when I remember listening to it. Music that my mom would listen to, driving back and forth from Steamboat to Denver [when I was] a child, or being in dance class” (Arithson).

Dabney brought the same record as another performer – the *Flashdance* soundtrack.

I remember dressing up as the girl from *Flashdance* for Halloween when I was five or six. I was a *dancer* – I wasn't a stripper, I was a *dancer*. But I was really inspired by *her*. And I used to do that little running in place thing she does. But when I was trying to explain it in the ensemble in our little exercise, I was like, "Wow." I was impressed at a very young age about this going-against-the-grain type of woman. Here she is, she's only eighteen, she's not highly educated or anything; she's a minority, she's biracial, she's working as a stripper, but it's an art form . . . there's all these different things. Wow, my mom gave me a very interesting feminist role model at a young age, and I had no idea. (Dabney Interview)

Alex Reed visited one of the local vinyl stores in Boulder and picked up the *Face Dances* album by The Who.

We passed [the records] around and admired them. Most of us had never used them before, including me. My record had really gorgeous cover art. So I was just sitting there, just wanting to hold this thing and admire the cover art, and pass it around to other people – "Oh, wow, that is beautiful!" And so that day was a lot of fun. We brought in one of the turntables, which incidentally, I had to figure out how to make that work in Tech Lab that same day. [. . .] I put on a song off of this album called "The Quiet One." It was a song about being the quiet one, but it's a really hard rocking song. So I would turn it up and say, "People call me the quiet one," blast the song, and turn it back down. [. . .] It led to me asking my

dad to hook up the turntable at home, and pull out his collection of records, and I spent all of Thanksgiving Break listening to his records. Tim would always talk about how much he loved vinyl records. (Reed)

The Spectrum

The records were not used in the final *Litmus* performance, but other “sidebar” exercises were. Miller developed an exercise I call the “Spectrum” at Southern Methodist University, but *Litmus* was the first time he incorporated the exercise into a performance. In the rehearsal room, Miller created an imaginary line running diagonally through the space. He began by calling out various opposing pairs, asking the students (including the full cast, plus stage manager Kate Boyles and assistant stage manager Kayla Wall) to stand on one side of the room or the other based on how they responded to the opposites he identified. Miller began with relatively low stakes pairs, such as dog people to one side, cat people to the other. As the students warmed up to the exercise, binaries with more potential for controversy or vulnerability were included: if you are pro-life, walk to this side, pro-choice to the other. What began as two polar opposites evolved into a spectrum as students began placing themselves at various points in the middle of the imaginary line rather than only at the endpoints. Eventually, Miller opened it up to the students to pose their own questions to the group. Alex Reed particularly enjoyed the Spectrum exercise:

We kind of took over the process in the end because we were all so fascinated with each other and where we were. “Oh, why are you in the middle? Why do you think this?” [. . .] I like to throw out provocative questions. The ones I asked were, “How smart do you think you are, scale of zero to one hundred?” And

people would rate themselves. And then, “How smart do you think people think you are?” (Reed)

The exercise lent itself well to an election-based project about red states and blue states, and it was incorporated into the performance of *Litmus* as the pre-show sequence (“We found each other’s positions so fascinating, we thought the audience would, too” [Reed]). As the audience entered the Loft Theatre, the ensemble arranged and rearranged themselves across the stage diagonally, in response to binary pairs called out by Miller via P.A. “People who grew up rural to the blue side. People who grew up city to the red side. People who eat meat to the blue side. People who do not eat meat to the red side.” The binaries continue as the ensemble sometimes align along the extreme poles and more often array themselves in the gray (purple?) space in between: men and women; gay and straight; registered to vote and not registered; those who feel closer to their feminine side or their masculine side; those who believe in a higher power and those who don’t; those who’ve turned off their cell phones and those who haven’t. Reed described it as “another way of introducing ourselves, and in a very intimate way,” in addition to the ensemble’s body maps which were hung in the hallway leading into the theatre. “Some of my best memories of *Litmus* are of doing that pre-show thing of where everyone stood,” Reed continued. “I just thought it was beautiful how it turned out” (Reed). Stephanie Spector noticed that the Spectrum often contradicted audience expectations: “people who watch porn and people who don’t. [. . .] People expect that to be men on one side. So it was always fun to see the women who would go over to the ‘yes, I have watched porn’ [side]” (Spector). Karen Dabney, who was teaching an “Introduction to Theatre” course that semester, expressed some trepidation about performing the Spectrum pre-show with her

students in the audience (attendance was not required of her students, but was eligible for extra credit). “There were a couple of things where I was like, I don’t necessarily want my students to know where I land, [. . .] but I wanted to keep the integrity of the project and not fib, or lie, or put myself in a different place than where I really should have been” (Dabney Interview). Jordan thought “it felt almost [like] one of the cornerstone purposes of the piece. To be within the performance and saying that, you know, I was never really asked about this, this is actually where I stand. I thought it was just amazing” (Jordan).



Fig. 14. The cast line up along the “Spectrum,” between the blue side and the red side. Photo courtesy of the University of Colorado Boulder Department of Theatre & Dance.

Once each ensemble member had created a handful of pieces through the first week or so of rehearsal time, Miller began thinking ahead to the larger structure of the piece and how each piece might play off the others. The cast was asked to start thinking about which piece felt

most urgent, or necessary to perform. The ensemble varied in their characterizations of Miller's role in shaping *Litmus* overall. Sarah Adler felt Miller used a fairly strong hand in his editorial choices: "He basically made us narrow it down to the pieces he thought worked best. And we had choices to make, but usually we went with what he said because he was right" (Adler).

Eddy Jordan commented that:

If we felt passionate, he was definitely approachable enough to be open to something, but if he wanted something, he'd really, you know, share his passion about it. Once you had that, you could tell that that's kind of what he wanted. He just seemed to enjoy it all so much. It would be hard to impose your will on that [. . .] I was just so intimidated by the whole process, there's no way I was like "No, Tim!" There was no way that would happen. (Jordan)

Nathan Ellgren: Election Mail

Litmus opened with Nathan Ellgren's vignette about working in the "the largest student run mailroom on campus," where he was responsible for delivering large quantities of election mail to students

who don't check their mail at all, so much that sometimes boxes get stuffed to the brim, like literally, we can't put a sliver – one more sheet of paper – inside of it. We have to take all of that out and log it as a package, and email them. That way, they go, "Oh, I have a package." And we say it's a package because otherwise they won't come down. [. . .] And it's mind-boggling, the irony, the amount that elections try to target this undergraduate audience, this 18 – just turned 18, "I'm a freshman in college, I can vote now, get me to vote for you –"

through a medium that is so bad like snail mail. It doesn't reach them. They don't see any of the messages. All this election mail that comes in, and it doesn't benefit us, it isn't supplying any more information to a potential voter because they're not receiving it at all. And it just goes into the recycling bin. (Ellgren)

As mentioned above, *Litmus* was originally envisioned as a way for students to directly address the election and its presence on campus, but that thematic focus was not enforced. The majority of the participants chose to address the election obliquely (by exploring the personal and political aspects of identity, for example), or to direct their performance focus on other elements of their lives. The election theme remained present through several ensemble vignettes interspersed into the evening. In addition to the Spectrum pre-show, the cast sang a collection of election annoyances to the tune of "My Favorite Things" and comically re-enacted Romney ads someone discovered on gay pornography websites. Ellgrens' piece was the only individual vignette that explicitly and directly centered on the election, and Miller's choice to open the program with a commentary on wasted election mail framed the other pieces that would follow as election-adjacent, if not election-specific.

Bernadette Sefic: The Gray Scale

Bernadette Sefic was inspired by the Spectrum exercise, particularly the idea that we rarely fit the polar ends of a binary; we more often find ourselves somewhere in the middle. Her piece opened with the assumptions people make based on incomplete information.

When my uncle found out that I fully supported gay rights, instantly I was labeled a liberal Democrat. When my volleyball team discovered that I was pro-life, immediately I was labeled a conservative Republican. When I told my boyfriend

that I was listed as a Libertarian, suddenly I was a government hating world
burning anarchist. (qtd. in Adler et al. 6)

She used two fellow performers as metaphorical magnets to demonstrate the inefficiency of forcing labels on people. “I tried to force the magnets together, but they repelled as magnets do when they’re flipped” (Sefic).

Eddy Jordan: An Oasis of Vaginas

Eddy Jordan employed his self-deprecating (and sometimes goofy) sense of humor and a bit of hyperbole to enact, then subvert the cultural narratives about achieving the “right” kind of masculinity, defined by a physically strong and attractive body and access to women. In his piece, Jordan, who is tall and lanky, bounced between the mirror (where he would “see a pimple and be like, ‘Oh god, *you* – you’re it. You’re the reason I can’t get laid,’”) and another part of the stage where he would do frantic pushups, which “were kind of what society had projected onto my gender of what I should be. So I’d be doing pushups, and yelling out like, ‘Ah! Football! Sports! Chunky soup!’” (Jordan). According to this culturally inherited narrative, Jordan should then arrive at an “oasis of vaginas!,” his reward for living up to the masculine standard. Jordan realizes, however, that relationships built on these standards are hollow, and he would prefer a woman who likes jazz and genuinely cares about him, not someone who can only embrace the outward standards while ignoring the inner reality. More importantly, Jordan asks himself and the audience in the concluding question of his piece, “Why do I spend so much time worrying about how I am perceived by others when all that truly matters is how I perceive myself?” (qtd. in Adler et al. 7).

Fellow performer Daniel Leonard appreciated Jordan's use of humor to address a vulnerability that "was funny because it shouldn't have been funny, if that makes sense."

[He] naturally knew how to break an audience's tension so that they'll listen to what you want to say. With Eddy's . . . counting his pushups and then checking in the mirror to see what's going on, and you realize – it's funny, we've all been through it, we know exactly what he's doing – and you realize what you're watching is a story about a guy who feels like he can't approach women just because of his body. And you don't think that way, but Eddy framed it that way so you laugh, you knew he wasn't trying to preach to you. He didn't come here today to deliver a message, and boy you'd better take it home. He came in just to talk about it, and it was so honest, and it was so opening, and that's what Tim inspired. (Leonard)

Andryn Arithson: Boys Will Wear Pants, Girls Will Wear Dresses

Andryn Arithson remembers finding the seeds of her final performance on the first day of rehearsal. Miller provided the group with a prompt: "tell me about a time when you said 'no' to someone," and sent small groups to create short pieces building on that.

I wrote about being in music class, when my music teacher in third grade wanted me to wear a dress for the recital, and it just totally was crushing my soul because I was not a dress-wearing girl. And it just made me feel so humiliated. I thought I'm going to look so stupid wearing this dress. Which was totally me, but it was very important to me at the time. It felt devastating. So I said I wasn't going to do it, and she couldn't make me, so I didn't. So that was my story. [. . .]

It kind of went from that piece into a piece about lesbian invisibility, or queer women's invisibility in the world, and how they're either not represented, or you don't recognize someone as queer, therefore they are straight. And we just don't think about them as part of the population. (Arithson)

Karen Dabney: Kansas rap

Dabney created a piece about being from Kansas, but was not entirely sure where she wanted to take it. "The rap came first. All of a sudden I wrote this rap about being from Topeka. I can't freestyle, but I like to write my raps, and I feel good with that." She sent it to Miller, who responded positively, but Dabney felt the rap needed more context.

I was struggling how to write an intro into the rap. And I remember, seriously, almost everybody I've ever met, when they find out I'm from Kansas, they're always, "You're not in Kansas anymore!" There's always some sort of fucking reference to *The Wizard of Oz*, which is so sad that there's just so little that people have to reference certain parts of the world, even in our own country.

(Dabney Interview)

The introduction Dabney used in the performance confronted the *Wizard of Oz* association with Kansas and the presence of Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, which also complicated Dabney's relationship with her hometown. "I finally got away, and realized what it's like to not see people picketing on a daily or weekly basis. To not have that stuck in your face all the time" (Dabney Interview). In performance, Dorothy's "There's no place like home" from *The Wizard of Oz* took on a bittersweet resonance as Dabney recreated it in context of both the nostalgia of Dorothy's homesickness and the "hateful messages" of the WBC that is

also associated with Kansas (qtd. in Adler et al. 13). Clicking her heels and reciting “there’s no place like home” became “a ritual, and if you’re going to do a ritual, this is the space to do it. The clicking of the heels was very transformative for me” (Dabney Interview). A few lines of her Kansas rap:

But this one crazy church,
Fred Phelps and his clan
Started hating, perpetrating
All around my homeland
Picket signs, wicked lines
Every corner, every day
Numb myself to endure these
Daily visions of hate [. . .]
But as I look at things now
I see why I claim my space
Not all Topekans be angels
Not all are a disgrace. (qtd. in Adler et al. 14-15)

On a lighter note, the rest of the cast got together before the final performance of *Litmus* and performed Dabney’s Kansas rap for her. “They’d seen it so many times they had it memorized. They even did my gestures. [laughing] And it was just really, really . . . I almost started to cry, it was really sweet” (Dabney Interview).



Fig. 15. “I was born . . .” The cast of *Litmus* take their places on the map of the United States as they announce where they were born. Photo courtesy of the University of Colorado Boulder Department of Theatre & Dance.

Miller had acquired a gobo that projected a map of the United States onto the stage floor in light. The combination of this technical element and Dabney’s “Kansas rap” led to an ensemble piece about places of origin, as Dabney told me: “When I came up with the Kansas rap, he was like [gasp] ‘This fits! We’re gonna use it, we can tie it together!’ Then all of a sudden, he’s like, ‘that’s a group thing now, everyone can talk about where they’re from, and then we’ll end on yours.’ And it was interesting because mine was the only one that dealt with where I’m from, or a place” (Dabney Interview). After Dabney’s vignette in the performance, each member of the ensemble announced where they were born, and stood there on the map. The stage manager, assistant stage manager, and run crew also joined the cast onstage or called out their place of birth from the booth.

Tanner Cahoon: cell phone symphony

Tanner Cahoon had difficulty locating the *one* thing he had to talk about. “I don’t know what matters to me. It sounds bad, it sounds like I’m just some dumb kid. But I was like, there’s nothing that I’m *that* passionate about over everything else” (Cahoon). One night in rehearsal, he remembered a conversation he had had at a summer camp about the saturation of technology, and improvised a piece about

our overuse of technology and our pathetic reliance with cell phones and technology and how we’re just stressed without it. It didn’t seem very profound to me, but apparently it was different to other people. [. . .] And I remember that night everyone for some reason was like, “Tanner, that piece was awesome, that was important.” And I remember Tim liked it a lot. (Cahoon)



Fig. 16. Tanner Cahoon’s cell phone symphony. Photo courtesy of the University of Colorado Boulder Department of Theatre & Dance.

In performance, the full ensemble walked around the stage space in darkness to a chorus of beeps and ringtones, glued to their cell phones. “It was lit by cell phones and that’s where I started having fun with it, in like how am I going to make this more artistic? How can I make it cool and effectively delivered? That’s when it did mean something” (Cahoon).

My Election Things

After Cahoon’s piece, the ensemble broke into a brief musical number to the tune of “My Favorite Things” from Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The Sound of Music*. In this version, the lyrics were replaced by references to life on an election-saturated college campus. Some excerpts:

Romney on taxes,

Obama on healthcare.

One has the money,

And one wants a fair share.

Bigoted volunteers calling at night,

This time the voting is gonna be tight. (qtd. in Adler et al. 21)

Brad Steinmeyer: Not My Story

Brad Steinmeyer felt strongly about providing a “queer voice” within the show, but struggled to land on exactly what he wanted to say with that voice. Eventually he chose to critique the limited narratives available to queer youth in fiction and popular culture.

It’s the same story. [. . .] We have this crush on someone that is unattainable, which I did actually have, but it’s typically they always crush on the big, hunky, jock guy. And then they get bullied a lot and they have this big coming out

experience and then they fall in love and then it's either happy ending or they're doomed. And it's just like . . . it's a very boring narrative. (Steinmeyer)

In performance, Steinmeyer recreated, then disrupted this narrative. He started by following the media directive to find the right girl, then announced that he's gay, so that's not his story. He then played out the narrative of falling for the unattainable jock, who then shows up at the prom realizing that he's gay, too, "which is every fucking queer young adult novel ever [. . .] but this isn't my story either" (Steinmeyer). Steinmeyer closed his piece by acknowledging that he doesn't have to want someone just because popular culture tells him they are desirable. He expressed a hope of eventually finding someone as unique as he is, claiming the same specificity of story that Miller advocates for: queer or straight, "we all have our own unique story" (Steinmeyer).

Gay porn for Romney

At some point during the rehearsal process, Miller "had them make these little micro-pieces about some corner of the way they've experienced the election" (Miller, 2012 interview). One of the students had discovered that the Romney/Ryan campaign had made a significant ad buy on gay porn sites. "Every gay porn site has a Romney ad on it. It's hysterical" (Miller, 2012 Interview). This micro-piece was included in *Litmus*, as two male students start performing a cliché porn scenario "while someone's on their computer, and then the Romney ad appears. It was very clever. [. . .] It's a very funny little corner of how the campaign is progressing" (Miller, 2012 interview).

Sarah Adler: Porn is for Boys, Not for Girls

The micro-piece led directly into Sarah Adler's vignette. Early in the rehearsal process,

she had been working on a piece about sexual abuse, which

was fueled about a lot of the women I have known in my life who had had these experiences, [. . .] but the reality was that I was creating pieces with stories that weren't mine because I had not been abused. And that wasn't, that isn't . . . I can't do that. That wasn't a way that I could really, truthfully talk about that experience. That kind of spurred me into this realization that part of rape culture, and part of all the research and understanding that I have about that has to do with how men and women are taught about sex. (Adler)

Adler told a story about a friend discovering pornography at age thirteen, and when Adler's stepmother found it on her computer and told her father, he "told me Don't you EVER, EVER, EVER look at that shit it is absolutely disgusting . . . I felt two inches tall" (Adler et al. 26). A few years later, her brother was caught looking at pornography. Their father advised him to be more careful about not getting caught, but if he ever needed a magazine to let him know. "I think that a lot of gender problems stem from how we're taught differently about a lot of different things, but I zoned in on sex. [. . .] It was very funny, actually, it was a lot of fun. But it ended up being kind of smart [laughs]" (Adler). Alex Reed played one of Adler's brothers and her father in the piece. He told me, "It was very interesting playing a part of someone's life like that. That was actually my favorite part of it. I had more fun acting in that piece than in my own, actually" (Reed).

Sergio King: The Only Black Guy

During the Spectrum exercise in the rehearsal room, Miller asked students who were white to stand on one side of the room, students who were not white on the other. Sergio King

found himself standing alone on the non-white side of the room. “I was like, ‘Oh, all right. I guess this is happening,’” he told me. “Because being a person of color at CU-Boulder, I see it everywhere, and it’s always in the back of my mind, but to have it physicalized was very weird” (King). King created and performed a piece about some of his favorite black actors, who are all limited to sidekick roles. “Sometimes it is a lonely job to have. You see I get stuck in these roles” (qtd. in Adler et al. 28). He went on to describe the ways he’s more than just “the only black guy,” starting with the fact that he’s half Asian (“I am Blasian. I’m a BLASIAN surprise!” [qtd. in Adler et al. 28]).

I feel like that piece in particular was an accumulation of everything that I have experienced as a minority and I just put it out on the stage. And I feel like it resonated with people. And it was very . . . it was very . . . what’s the right word? I guess refreshing for me to be able to talk about those kind of things and bring it up and put it on the forefront of people’s minds because usually it’s kind of swept under the rug, you know? We want to be politically correct. So talking about it was cool. It ignited a conversation, and it still ignites conversations in my life today. (King)

As King developed this piece, Miller commented on how surprising he found CU’s racial demographics:

It’s super white, which is sort of strange. I was talking with Tammy [Meneghini] about it. It’s expensive, cost of living is high here, it appeals to students in white pastimes, like skiing and mountaineering, which are super – I almost never feel whiter than when I’m hiking in the mountains. But for Sergio, in a context like

this . . . and in his life he has been so often the only black person. Actually, multi-racial, but reads as black and the world would understand him as black, just like the world understands our President as black. And for him to finally make a piece about what it's been to be the only one, is a real . . . That's a good piece for him to have done, within the program, which in some ways has a hard time maybe even talking about race because there's just not enough diversity for it to come up easily. (Miller, 2012 interview)

When I interviewed King in 2015, he felt that *Litmus* had helped him see himself as

more than just the minority. There is such a thing as color blind casting, I can do other stuff. Especially this year, I'm playing Damis in *Tartuffe*, [. . .] I'm trying to look at myself like that. Yes, I can be in that box, I can do those kind of things. But I can also do A, B, and C. And that's a valuable skill I've learned as an actor, to think of yourself outside of the box because a lot of times you have to. Even though people want to put you in a box. (King)

"I once was the only ____"

King's moment of being the only person of color in that rehearsal room sparked an assignment from Miller to the cast to identify a moment they'd felt alone or isolated. They each completed the sentence "I once was the only _____," and the resulting statements were incorporated into the final performance, as King completed his vignette about his frustrations being seen as the token black sidekick: "I once was the only boy in stilettos"; "I once was the only senior transfer student at my new high school"; "I once was the only bipolar teenager I knew"; "I once was the only girl who was taller than all the boys"; and "I once was the only

Republican voter in a cast full of Democrats,” are a few examples (qtd. in Adler et al. 29-30).

That portion of the performance resonated with Eddy Jordan: “We all found common thread with where Sergio was, in that moment. In that disunity, we found unity, which I thought was really beautiful” (Jordan).

Alex Reed: Stand Up for Atheists

Alex Reed chose to confront stereotypes about atheism. His piece opened as a solo as he spoke of atheists being “defined on a negative. No God. The word makes it sound like we are actively rejecting. We are opposing. Worse still, we are a void” (qtd. in Adler et al. 30).

I ended up asking for all the real atheists, agnostics, general not-affiliated-with-religion people to be in my piece. [. . .] I remember being a little nervous, actually, about asking for all the real atheists/agnostics to join me because it had been such an egalitarian atmosphere, I was kind of nervous about introducing a barrier like that. But it turned out to be fine. And people could self-identify, and do it if they wanted. (Reed)

His piece then took a more positive spin: “We do believe in something. We believe in people, and our ability to make rational, moral decisions and rules, with no need for dogma or indoctrination. We believe in each other. We believe in all of you” (qtd. in Adler et al. 31).

Those who chose to be in Reed’s piece stood, joined hands, and ran in a circle. “Tim in particular was in love with this idea of a circle. [. . .] He mentioned several times to me how it was the first time he’d ever had a student in one of his workshops talk about atheism in this way. And that in several of the places he taught, it would have been actively discouraged” (Reed).

Tony Dostert: What's In a Name?

Tony Dostert spent several rehearsals creating pieces about his identity in relationship to other people, particularly his family. At the same time, he stumbled on a Facebook post that included his extended family tree. “The furthest back they could track was Anthony Dostert and then Anastasia Dostert. And that’s actually my name, and my sister’s name. [. . .] I’m named after my great-uncle, who’s named after his great-uncle, who’s named after their father, and I’m actually like the thirteenth one in the family” (Dostert). The idea of thirteen other Anthony Dosterts made this Dostert wonder about the relationship between name and identity, “whether or not I identify as this name I was given, and this persona that’s been perpetuated within my family. Or whether I am different and unique and stand alone” (Dostert). These questions overlapped with Dostert’s interest “in the idea of performing in the nude and how that affects not only the meaning of the piece, but also how that plays into the overall audience interaction” (Dostert). In the piece that he developed over the remainder of the rehearsal process, Dostert stripped away layers of his clothing as he stripped away the names and identities that others had layered on him. At the “end of the day, we’re all just human, and we’re all just bodies” (Dostert).

Dostert cited the importance of the trust that had developed among the cast, so that by the time he got to the point of performing naked within rehearsals (he performed “shirtless, and then in just my boxers, and then eventually with just a piece of paper in front of my junk, to then also being naked during a part of my performance”), the nudity felt like “a safe thing to do” (Dostert). He also appreciated Miller’s support: “I think he knew where I wanted to go, and

I think it was him giving me permission, but also not wanting me to feel like I was forced or coerced into performing naked” (Dostert).

Red Clothes / Blue Clothes / White Underwear

Throughout the performance, two large piles of miscellaneous items of clothing sat on opposite ends of the stage space. One pile was all red clothing; the other was entirely blue. “This piece is becoming really about clothes, too,” Miller told me. “These two huge piles of red clothes and blue clothes that we’re really working with. They’re doing beautiful work. Clothes have always interested me. Costumes are like our writing” (2012 interview). Toward the end of *Litmus*, after Dostert was stripped bare, the rest of the cast joined together as a group and ceremoniously unclothed one another, until the entire cast was dressed in white underwear, undershirts, etc. Assistant director Andryn Arithson:

We took each other’s clothes off just to be in our white underwear, and there was something really . . . intimate and interesting about that. And I remember telling [the rest of the cast] that I think this is a great idea, but we can’t be giggly about it, this is not sexual in any way. This is requiring tons of trust from all of us, so we really need to respect what it is that we’re doing in this moment.

(Arithson)

Once the street clothing was gone and the cast were all in their white underwear, they teased the audience with the possibility that they would go further (a thumb in the waistband starting to move downward, for example). As Dostert remembers it:

Tim was rather excited because in his mind he really was hoping that after my piece the audience would be in that mind space where they think it could

happen, and they think that potentially the exposure to one naked body could multiply and become twenty-five. It was always kind of a fun little moment because everyone was super on the edge of their seat about [Dostert's voice rises in pitch through this next thought] "Am I about to see twenty-five more naked bodies, oh my god, what's happening?" And then we played it off very much as a joke, and fun and teasing. (Dostert)

The underwear stayed on; the cast instead re-clothed themselves (and each other) in all red or all blue, and staged a tug of war between the two colors. Arithson and Karen Dabney became team captains, of a sort. Arithson: "I think I was the blue side and Karen was the red side. So I facilitated the students coming up with movements to go with that color. So we were kind of oceanic" (Arithson). After the tug of war, the cast began trading individual items amongst themselves so that everyone had both red and blue pieces. Dabney laughed afterward about some of the technical complications this clothing trade off created. "There were several of us that were bigger girls. Or even Tucker, who's just a bigger guy. There were certain things that [were too small and] we could not wear." The cast worked in pairs for the clothing trade, and she told her partner:

"This is the deal. Either you pick out this or this bottom, or let's just say we'll do tops 'cause that's just a much easier thing to deal with." But it was so funny because sometimes he'd get me this huge blue jacket that was definitely super huge on me, but it was like, "Good job!" And then there were days where I'd be like, "Okay, I'll squeeze into this little . . ." It was precious. And the look on his face when he realized he got the wrong thing. (Dabney Interview)

The performance concluded with the performers lying down one by one on the floor (and on or across each other), each offering a line of what they hoped for the future: “I hope for empathy”; “I hope the government will stay away from my body”; “I hope that one day my marriage will be legal”; “I hope that there will always be disagreement”; I hope to one day see a woman become President”; I hope that my best friend is registered to vote”; and finally, “I hope that America wins this election” (qtd. in Adler et al. 32-4).



Fig. 17. The *Litmus* ensemble at the end of the performance, after the red and blue clothing swap. Photo courtesy of the University of Colorado Boulder Department of Theatre & Dance.

Audience Response

During the performance, the ensemble remained on stage throughout, sitting on the floor in front of the audience when not performing themselves. Tony Dostert tried to be supportive of his fellow performers when the cast was functioning as part of the audience. “Tim

really cares about when the spotlight isn't on you that you are there in complete support of whoever might be in the spotlight" (Dostert). Bernadette Sefic explained, "we were the audience as much as anyone else. [. . .] We never felt like plants. We weren't supposed to be laughing to make the audience laugh, or being quiet to make the audience quiet. We were just earnestly sitting there as the audience" (Sefic). Sydney Bogatz also commented on the cast's role as both audience and ensemble; in her view, while the ensemble-as-audience reactions were not intended to make the audience-as-audience laugh, they did serve as "guides" for how to watch *Litmus*. "They saw us laughing and cracking up – some of them were so funny – and so then they thought, 'Okay, we can crack up too, we can laugh, too'" (Bogatz).

The cast was aware of the potential for strong audience reactions to their material. Tony Dostert, in particular, knew that "in my piece, there was the potential of someone getting up and leaving. Even though we advertised that there was male nudity, [. . .] what happens if someone has an audible response, whether it be positive like cheering, or heckling, or potentially booing?" He appreciated Miller's efforts to prepare him for the possibility, but "luckily, the audience never got to that place" (Dostert). Bogatz was relieved at the generally positive response from the audience:

Everyone was really respectful. Like when Tony got completely naked [and] we all stripped down to our underwear. But we didn't hear snickers, we didn't feel uncomfortable performing for our audience, which was really nice. I think we were all worried about that, kind of. Are they going to laugh? Are they going to cover their eyes? Something like that. But they kind of took it as art, and that was cool. (Bogatz)

Andryn Arithson felt the audience reactions varied from performance to performance:

One of the lines that I had was “I think butches are fucking sexy,” and there was one person in the audience that was like “Woo!” And I was like, “Yes! You one person out there who is appreciating what I’m saying, thank you for your cheer!” That was nice, because sometimes . . . I don’t know what anyone here is thinking about what I’m saying. Whatever, I don’t care, but it’s always nice to get some kind of validation back, or reaction. But I think the audience was listening very intently a lot of the time. [. . .] People are funny. Life is funny. It’s okay for it to be funny. But if the audience decides that they’re not laugh out loud people – it’s contagious or something. (Arithson)

“After the show,” when Miller performs one of his solo pieces, he likes “to leave the stage lights up and encourage folks to come up on stage. They can say hello to me or each other. [. . .] I like to have people feel that the stage is a place where they are welcome” (Miller, *Body Blows* 83-4). The same held true for *Litmus*, and Miller instructed the cast to remain onstage after the bows. As Tony Dostert remembers it, “if someone paid money, their hard earned money, to come see you, that then afterwards you greet them personally and you thank them for their time, you thank them for supporting you, you thank them for experiencing that” (Dostert). Daniel Leonard: “We didn’t leave [the] stage, so audience members could talk to the cast. And there was a lot of that. There was a lot of post-show engagement, which I think is really important” (Leonard). Leonard also connects the post-show engagement with the vulnerability of the cast spending a few minutes at the end of the show partially undressed. “Ending the show with all of these actors in their underwear, it was almost [. . .] breaking any

perception that the actors were unapproachable at the end of the performance. I think that was part of it” (Leonard).

Two cast members told me about being approached by strangers on the stage after *Litmus*. After one performance, a transgender woman approached Tony Dostert and told him she had just transitioned and was moved by his willingness to be nude in front of strangers. “That was something that she’s really struggled with, [choosing] intentionally, strategically, who she can share herself with and who she can be herself with in regards to both friends, families, but also lovers” (Dostert). Several people told Alex Reed, “we’re atheists, too. I’m glad you said that,” or “I was really happy you said that. It was honest and truthful” (Reed).

Reed also commented on the presence of his family in the audience. The performance “was the first time I’d admitted I was an atheist to my family. [. . .] They took it in stride. Like, ‘Oh. Makes sense.’ Yeah. It wasn’t a huge deal, it was just saying it out loud for the first time” (Reed). Steinmeyer was “so nervous ‘cause . . . I’m pretty sure [my family] knew I was sexually active at that point, but [it was] something we didn’t talk about.” He told them he wasn’t sure they should attend, but they really wanted to see him perform. Afterward, “they were just like really happy and like, ‘I don’t know what you were nervous about, it was so good, we’re so happy you were able to perform that’” (Steinmeyer). Sergio King’s parents had been hesitant about his decision to change majors from engineering to theatre. “But when they saw the piece, they saw us as an ensemble, they loved it. They knew that I made the right choice and that I was where I was supposed to be. So that was big for me personally” (King).

Student Papers as Audience Response

During the semester Miller was creating *Litmus* with the students at CU, I taught “Introduction to Theatre” with eighty-five students enrolled. The primary course objective is to make the students more perceptive, articulate and informed spectators of theatre. My students were assigned to attend and write about *Litmus*. Some of my students had never seen a live theatre performance before this class, whereas others had seen many touring Broadway musicals at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. I felt sure none of them had seen anything like *Litmus*. I was concerned that the unusual format would prevent them from fully engaging with and appreciating the performance without advance preparation. In the weeks leading up to *Litmus*, I spent class time talking about the history of solo and autobiographical performance; invited members of the cast to come speak to my class about the process of creating *Litmus*; introduced the concept of “critical generosity” (via David Román’s *Acts of Intervention* and Jill Dolan’s *Utopia in Performance*⁵); and held a class discussion about the dramaturgical function of nudity on stage.

I asked the students to structure their response papers around three memorable vignettes or moments from the show, describe each of them in detail, and draw some conclusions about the larger performance from these examples. What is *Litmus* attempting?

⁵ “Critical generosity,” Román writes, “understands that criticism can be [. . .] a cooperative endeavor and collaborative engagement with a larger social mission” (xxv-xxvii). Dolan describes it as a critical practice that takes performance on its own terms, and values “cultural criteria equally as important as more straightforward aesthetic ones” (33).

Are there recurring themes? Whose voices are being heard? I also acknowledged that *Litmus* consisted of personal stories, and while performance analysis was still the highest priority in this essay, there was more room for my students to explore their personal or emotional reactions as audience members than in other papers for the class. Did anything resonate in a powerful way? What made them uncomfortable (and more importantly, why)?

For this chapter, I reviewed eighty-two student papers, each two-three pages in length, adding up to about 75,000 words in total, and anonymized with IRB approval. Some non-identifying details were preserved: the gender of the student is marked in my otherwise random numbering system, and several of the papers acknowledge the race of the writer in context of how they responded to the performances. It's worth noting at this point that these papers are inevitably flawed measuring sticks for truly understanding the students' experiences. While they are, for the most part, honest individual responses to the performances contained in *Litmus* – some of them quite personal – they were also written for a grade, with myself and my teaching assistant as the intended audience. Did my permission to engage on a personal level with the performances encourage a kind of false disclosure, or an exaggeration within the responses? Are these students writing from a place of honesty in their reactions, or just to please or impress me? Furthermore, these students represent one small cross section of the audience as a whole. Nonetheless, these papers can provide some documentation of audience response to *Litmus*, and so with the above questions in mind, I have compiled some generalizations and anecdotes from the papers.

The word “unique” or “uniqueness” appeared fifty-four times in relation to the performance (i.e. “*Litmus* has a unique structure” or “. . . emotions, dreams and personalities

that are unique to [the performers]”: F008; M003). Similar phrasing, such as “*Litmus* was unlike any theatrical piece I have ever seen before,” appeared an additional thirteen times (F003). In some papers, the style and structure of the performance as a whole was described as unusual or unique. Most usages of the word, however, referred to the specificity of the stories being told, or to the ways the structure allowed the uniqueness of the performers and their individual experiences to come through. Sometimes both appeared in the same sentence: “*Litmus* was totally unique in that it used these very individual students’ unique experiences that no one else could have” (F005). This suggests that Miller’s goal of encouraging each performer to find and communicate the specificity of their own experience is being effectively conveyed to an audience through the style and structure he has developed. The word “relate” or “relatable” appeared more than eighty times in the responses, in phrases such as “he was someone I could relate to”; “issues that related to me as a college student”; “I can relate to it on a personal level”; etc. (F017; F012; F026). This indicates to me that the performance successfully engaged its audience.

Since the students were asked to choose which vignettes to write about, I was interested in how those choices played out in terms of numbers. Twenty-three students wrote about Sergio King’s piece resisting his assigned identity as the “token black guy”; twenty responded to Andryn Arithson’s piece about refusing to wear a dress as a queer ten-year-old; and nineteen wrote about Sarah Adler’s story of being caught watching porn as a girl and the very different reaction her brother received in a similar situation. I also want to highlight the students’ response to Dostert’s nudity in the performance, and the willingness of these student writers, in many cases, to put themselves in the shoes of the performers and to engage self-

reflexively with those performances. I include these statistics regarding the most written about vignettes as a way to evaluate what the students responded to overall, not as a measure or indication of the “best” performances. *Litmus* was, after all, an ensemble piece that depended on the coordination of all the performances for its success.

Two responses to Sergio King’s performance stood out to me. A young African American man in my class wrote that he identified with King’s performance, specifically “being identified as the athlete or other stereotypes,” by people who lack experience with racial diversity, “which is common in Boulder.” He continues:

There is pointed humor and a specific niche they expect us to fill regardless of whether or not the stereotypical assumptions capture our true personality. [. . .] Even though it is just a play I immediately felt what he has felt. It totally connects to what I felt *Litmus* was about, which was acceptance and how he wants to be recognized for who he actually is and not for what people often think black people should be. (M004)

A white student who was a friend of King’s wrote of gaining a new perspective on King’s day-to-day reality:

Whether it was at school, in class, or even in *Litmus*, he always seemed to be the only black guy. [. . .] He explained that it really forced him to hold back because people saw him as just that – their one black friend. [. . .] I started to get a little emotional. My mind instantly flashed back to the time I first met Sergio. Was I someone who just saw him as a black friend that I could joke around with or did I see him as Sergio, the person he wants us all to know and love? (M006)

Several students wrote that although they did not directly identify with Andryn Arithson's "boys will wear pants, girls will wear dresses" story, they could sympathize with her dilemma and some raised questions about how they would have reacted. For example:

"Although I am not gay, the performer was really able to make me feel sympathetic for her and made me feel happy she was able to overcome it and find her own voice"; "While I did not directly identify with the idea of societies [sic] norms associated with clothing as a struggle in my life, I was able to relate to how she felt pressure from those with power as to how to act and present oneself and that to face those pressures alone can be a lonely and painful struggle"; and "I started to question all the times in my life where I had to decide where I stood in a situation. [. . .] I was never judged on dating a boy or being interested in men. However, after listening to her story, I couldn't imagine what life would be like if my sexual preference wasn't widely socially accepted" (F004; M014; F020). Another student wrote of closely identifying with Arithson's struggle as one she recognized from her own life:

The binary gender system left her feeling like an "invisible lesbian" who did not fit into any of the socially accepted categories. [. . .] This vignette in particular hit close to home for me, as I went through many similar situations in my struggle to come to terms with my lesbian identity. The performer of this piece defied the societal standards by stressing how the existence of two distinct gender poles can leave people that do not fit into either category feeling invisible. (F038)

One student wrote about both Arithson's dress/pants dilemma and Adler's comic treatment of discovering the double standard for boys and girls around sexuality, and concluded her essay with:

This performance was very powerful to me. It made me feel more awkward and uncomfortable than I have a long time, but it's because they were real stories that I could really connect to, which made me uncomfortable because I have first hand felt many of the things these vignettes expressed. Such as the lesbian being told to wear dresses, as a child my mother always made me dress up in skirts and dresses for family events and church, etc., but I hated it. (F044)

Response to Adler's piece seems more gender-influenced than other vignettes: of the nineteen students who wrote about this piece, fourteen were female, five male. One young man disagreed with Adler's conclusion that the double standard was unfair, noting that "if I were her father I would not want my daughter watching porn" (M017). Another male student's reaction was to get "angry with the father" and acknowledge "how shocked I would be if my brother got praised for the same thing I got in trouble for" (M022). The responses from female students were more likely to reflect understanding of the double standard Adler critiqued: "Growing up with two brothers myself, I too remember that one point in my pre-teen years where I questioned the differences in the way we were raised"; and "I was a bit surprised by this performance because in society we usually do not talk about porn so openly in public, but I had a sad emotional response because I realized, just as the performer had, that this is unfair gender treatment" (F012; F031). Several responded positively to the comedy of Adler's performance; one student called it "absolutely hysterical" (F026).

Responses to Dostert's nudity were mixed. One young woman wrote of feeling uncomfortable at first, but then "I felt more united with the performer than I would have

otherwise.” She writes that she reacted strongly to this performance because Dostert had been her Residential Advisor the year before:

As my RA, I felt disconnected with him, almost as though he was my “enemy.” I regrettably never made the effort to get to know him. It wasn’t until he was standing before me a year later, naked, with nothing else to offer but ultimately everything to give, that I felt a strong emotional connection with him. He wasn’t just my old RA, but an incredible, and expressive human being, as well as a phenomenal performer. (F011)

Another student wrote that the nudity “stood out to me in a negative way.”

I connected to the actor as he spoke about bearing his soul to others but when he literally did, I became a little put off. The actor did not undress himself to create humor, but rather to create intimacy and expose his soul to the audience. This act evoked the opposite emotion in me than intended because the connection [he] was aiming for was too personal for me. [. . .] Although this vignette is the most memorable, it was also the least effective. I don’t remember the actor’s message because the nudity was too distracting. (F036)

Assistant director and performer Karen Dabney also taught “Introduction to Theatre” on campus that semester. Her students weren’t required to attend the performance, but some of them opted to do so for extra credit, or simply because they were interested. “They seemed to really enjoy it,” Dabney told me.

Some of them even talked to me after the show when I was still sort of half dressed. [half laugh] I’d asked them in their responses to comment on at least

three different solo pieces and why. And I knew they would try to suck up and mention my rap, but I felt like some of them really liked the fact that it was . . . here we are not just doing a monologue, we're doing something more musical. Or, "Oh, I just didn't realize my professor came from this place, and it was really cool to learn about her town." (Dabney Interview)

Dabney was aware that grading papers as both performer and instructor might present conflicts, so for the most part awarded points for attendance at the event and completion of the response paper, "as long as I felt they were making sense of the show and sharing their response to the material" (Dabney email).

Overall, the positive responses to the performance as a whole far outweighed the occasional negative reaction to specific moments. Perhaps the best summation of the students' responses to *Litmus* actually came from one of the performers, Sarah Adler: "I think that when that many people get in a room and are unapologetically themselves in front of another group of people, you can't help but walk out feeling like . . . feeling more empowered to be yourself, you know? Or at least just feeling not alone" (Adler).

Conclusion

As part of my interviews with the participants, I asked them to contextualize *Litmus* in hindsight in terms of the project's impact. I tried to keep the question open-ended so that my experience with Miller would not lead them to their responses. Several commented on how present *Litmus* still was in their minds eighteen months after the performance: "He's still with me, for sure. [laughs] I don't think Tim leaves"; "I still dream about *Litmus*"; "it was only a month of my life, but it just stuck with me" (Arithson; Dostert; Bogatz).

Others responded that they'd like to have another opportunity to either work with Miller directly, or at least on another devised project. Andryn Arithson hopes "to work with young people again doing some kind of devised work. [. . .] I think about Tim's work still, and I would love to do something devised with a group of young people" (Arithson). Alex Reed "would love to do it again," and has had several conversations with Brad Steinmeyer "about doing a devised piece, our topic being 'what are you nerdy about?' Have people talk about what they're completely, enthusiastically passionate about" (Reed). Steinmeyer also expressed an interest in future collaborations with Miller. "If I had the opportunity to work with Tim again, I'd instantly go for it. He is so great, I admire him so much, and just his process is such a fun – demanding, but fun – thing to do" (Steinmeyer). Tony Dostert actually did collaborate with Miller again, traveling to New York City eight months after *Litmus* to participate in a workshop at the New Museum titled *Exhibit Q: Queer Bodies*.

Bernadette Sefic has engaged in devised projects since *Litmus*, but found she missed Miller's ability to make connections between pieces, or to push her in a productive direction she did not necessarily see herself.

I've been so fascinated with how Tim got the work out of us so well, in such a time efficient manner. Because the stuff I've done since then, we've gotten good stuff, but didn't know where to take it. Or it didn't match with everything else we'd created. Or we would have inspiration and a hint of a piece, but then no idea how to pull it into its full form. And I have no idea how everything I brought to the table [in *Litmus*] ended up getting made into the piece I did. There was once when he said, "Go home and put these three pieces together." I was like,

“How the hell am I gonna do that?” So I went home and mashed the text together to fit into what the main idea was, and with a little bit more tweaking, I had my piece. And I just . . . [I have] no idea how he saw the connections. (Sefic)

Other participants commented on how *Litmus* has influenced their approach to scripted theatre. Andryn Arithson: “It definitely influenced me when I directed [Caryl Churchill’s] *Far Away*. I used kind of the feeling of Tim when working with the ensemble.” She also told me she had been wanting to write a one-man show in the persona of her drag character, and working with Miller helped her focus her writing around prompts or objects. “It’s such a good way to get yourself going, to give yourself focus instead of just staring at a blank piece of paper” (Arithson). From her perspective as assistant director, she also commented on seeing the growth in some of the undergraduate students. Daniel Leonard changed directions and rewrote his piece fairly late in the process, and Arithson felt the permission Leonard had to make those changes was “really empowering for young actors to have that opportunity.” She continues:

Of course, they make lots of creative choices [when performing from a playwright’s script, with] directors telling them what they’re supposed to do, but it isn’t the same as coming up with the words yourself and really being respected for your own voice. Especially as a young person, I think that’s an important experience. And it also helps them to be more independent as artists, and more entrepreneurial as artists. Because depending on what they want to do in their life – being able to come up with a one-person show that’s all your own, that you’re not paying copyright for, and having the resources to do that and know that you can look in your own memory box – or your glory box as Tim would say

– and say, “what’s in here that I can put in my show that I already own?” You don’t need fancy lighting, you need a great story. You need to tell it well, you need to perform it well for people to want to watch it. But you don’t have to have a ton of money or resources to make great work. I think that working with Tim is unique, and he provides a particular expertise that you’re not going to find in an acting class. (Arithson)

Eddy Jordan:

[I] had to put myself in new places – I had to think as a director, I had to think as an isolated person, I had to think as a political activist, I had to think of all these different roles. Somewhere along the way, this mode of craft kind of became natural, and eventually almost conversational. So by the last week, we’d have an assignment and we’d perform it. And we were all such an ensemble then, that it really . . . it was like, all right, let’s see what you have to say. (Jordan)

Brad Steinmeyer had always been cast in minor roles in scripted plays and musicals.

With *Litmus*, “I actually had a voice, which was really empowering. I’d never spoken to an audience before. I spoke to eighty people a night and really engaged with them, and talked with them [. . .] I feel so much more comfortable performing now after doing that. That was a big stepping stone” (Steinmeyer, my emphasis). Tanner Cahoon felt *Litmus* made him “so much more aware of my body on stage now. Which is always something I struggled with. In high school, they were always, ‘Oh, you’ve got the Tanner awkward hands.’ I never knew what to do with my hands. So the show definitely gave me more of a physical awareness” (Cahoon).

Sarah Adler “really found my feet, started finding my voice in *Litmus*, which I think is really important to me as a performing artist. I’m on a journey to kind of find my voice and how I want to communicate. [. . .] You’re just you, it’s way more vulnerable, but it’s also more empowering, almost, because you’re really owning yourself in a huge way in front of so many other people” (Adler). She also found that the project opened up the possibilities of “writing my own material or doing my own kind of work. I thought it was really neat, even though I was so resistant to it [. . .] *Litmus* was exactly where I needed to be” (Adler).

Sydney Bogatz felt the impact was on her as a human being more than as an actor.

It wasn’t about memorizing lines and finding your character. It was about finding yourself and figuring out who you are and what story you want to tell the world. And it makes you think about who you are, and your life, and everything like that. So sometimes, like when I did my solo performance, I thought, “Okay. [. . .] What’s important right now? What have I been thinking about? What’s on my mind? If I do a piece, what’s going to make a difference?” Not even for anyone else, but just for me. (Bogatz)

Karen Dabney sent the text of her performance to a few friends and family members who weren’t able to attend the production of *Litmus*, and eventually performed it for her parents a year or two later.

They were moved, they were starting to choke up and get teary-eyed. “Oh, I didn’t get it” . . . I had emailed my mom the rap part, and she was like “That’s so funny!” And I was like, “it’s meant to go beyond funny, but good, I’m glad you appreciate that in some sense.” So when I performed it, there was an “Oh,”

because I think they didn't realize it was spoken word rap, it wasn't merely that I wrote words to a rhythm for the sake of it. (Dabney Interview)

Nathan Ellgren feels "like it opened me up [to] accepting an individual for who they are, and what their experiences are, and not judging at face value. Definitely not having any prejudice, really trying to put your feet in their shoes, understand how it feels to have the experience they've had, and to be coming from where they came from" (Ellgren).

Alex Reed felt the sense of ownership he and the rest of the cast felt around the material was powerful: "I think ultimately all of us left the show with a sense of ownership, a feeling that it was more our show than [Tim's], and I think that was good. I think that was the whole point of the exercise, for us to create a show that we thought of as ours" (Reed).

I opened this chapter by claiming that the placement of *Litmus* within the season offered opportunities and challenges regarding the immediacy and minimalism generally employed by Miller in other workshops and his own performances, and that the project was designed to supplement the existing theatre curriculum and the educational opportunities provided by other CU-Boulder season productions.

Miller wrote in *1001 Beds* that a primary goal in creating his solo performances is to "stay true to my crazy notion that I should always write about what is most truly on the front burner in my life" (4), and I have argued that this priority is consistently pursued in his teaching work as well. *Litmus* was conceptualized to confront the 2012 election as a likely topic on students' "front burner" in the last weeks before that election. While the election remained a present concern in the opening vignette, the use of red and blue costume elements, and in several ensemble moments, it took a backseat to other issues at play in the students' lives.

Thematically, the title *Litmus* was flexible enough to include other kinds of litmus tests, and throughout the rehearsal and creation process, the participants were encouraged to explore their own present concerns, regardless of their connection to the looming election. Many of the pieces confronted the identity categories imposed on the participants by outside forces; political identity functioned as a subset of these binary categories along with gender, sexuality, race, and religion (or its lack).

In Chapter 1, I quoted Miller's description of his style preference from his introduction to *Body Blows*:

[T]he truth is I prefer to allow the quicksilver imagination of the audience to work with me and make things appear and disappear with the minimum of fuss, muss, and shipping fees. [. . .] My stage space needs to be blank enough so it can serve as a surface on which the audience and I can imagine new social relations.

(xix-xxx)

Additional staff and technical elements (such as a lighting designer and the availability of costumes to the production) provided a richer, more colorful landscape for *Litmus* than for other Miller workshops. The use of red and blue costumes and light reinforced the thematic binaries that reappeared so frequently in the students' pieces. The event, however, was still driven by the performers and their stories. There were no set pieces, only piles of clothing and light. Transitions between individual vignettes were fluid, and the ensemble remained onstage as audience members when not performing. These choices preserved the "blank" stage ideal Miller aims for.

Litmus also offered an opportunity to present devised work to a larger audience than in other contexts, and the inclusion in CU-Boulder's Theatre performance season provided a mark of legitimacy to both the performance creation methodology and the resulting product. As part of the season, *Litmus* supplemented the existing curriculum. At Southern Methodist University, where Miller has been an annual guest artist for over fifteen years, his workshops are integrated into the course curriculum. His visits are scheduled in partnership with Dr. Rhonda Blair's solo performance course, which is explored in Chapter 5. Miller's weekend workshop happens over a highly compressed time frame, like *DocumentNation*, but because of its relationship to the solo performance course, the two-day workshop is entirely process oriented; there is no final performance incorporated into the workshop structure.

Chapter 5

Miller as Recurring Guest Artist at Southern Methodist University

In October 2014, I travelled to Dallas, Texas, to spend a weekend at Southern Methodist University researching Miller's recurring role as a guest artist at that institution. For over fifteen years, Miller has conducted a brief weekend workshop annually with SMU Theatre students as a supplement to Dr. Rhonda Blair's "Studies in Contemporary Performance: Solo Performance" course. Within this course, students spend the first section engaging with the work and writings of noted solo performers and performance artists. They next select a topic within that realm and write a research paper fully exploring it. In the final portion of the class, each student creates and performs an eight- to twelve-minute solo piece. Miller's workshop is neither a required part of the class nor restricted only to those enrolled in the solo performance class. Participation is highly encouraged, however, and the majority of workshop participants are students in the class. The workshop is designed to generate content, focus ideas, and otherwise prepare the students to continue developing their solo piece for the class.

The untitled workshop is entirely process-oriented; no final showing or performance is included within its structure. The SMU workshop was even more highly compressed than *DocumentNation* – ten hours of workshop time took place over a two-day weekend at SMU – but the lack of a final performance contributed to a far less stressful environment for Miller and for the fifteen participants. This case study's direct and overt connection to existing department

curriculum offers an opportunity to explore Miller's teaching methods as a specific supplement to this course. Miller's annual guest artist role within the Theatre division has also generated opportunities for Miller to mentor individual students from the program in more depth than generally possible with once only residencies.

This chapter, then, will primarily focus on documenting the 2014 workshop, the history of Miller's relationship with SMU, and the workshop's relationship to the solo performance course itself. As a secondary concern, it will also examine one mentor relationship Miller developed with performance artist and SMU alumnus Brigham Mosley.

Chapter Methodology

The contents of this chapter are primarily derived from my experience observing and participating in a workshop conducted by Miller at SMU October 18-19, 2014, in the Meadows School of the Arts building on campus at SMU. Approximately fifteen students participated in this workshop, though some of the students were present for part, but not all, due to external commitments. Over the course of two days, Miller, these SMU students, and I spent about ten hours in a rehearsal space diving into various exercises, creating semi-improvised performances, and reflecting on the work and the process as we progressed. I interviewed three of these participants the day after the workshop concluded to discuss their experience further. This chapter is also informed by an interview I conducted about two weeks after Miller's visit with Dr. Rhonda Blair, who developed the solo performance course and is Miller's primary faculty contact while at SMU; an informal "conference hour" presentation and Q&A by Miller and SMU alumnus Brigham Mosley; and an interview with Mosley about Miller's mentorship within the SMU program and beyond his graduation from that program.

As requested by Southern Methodist University's office of Research Administration, all current students who participated in Miller's October 2014 workshop at SMU are referred to by pseudonym. The first appearance of their pseudonym appears in quotations marks (i.e. "Harper"); in service of avoiding typographical clutter, subsequent usages will not include the quotation marks. I did not record the workshop itself; while I occasionally quote the text of the performances created within them, it should be noted that unless specified otherwise (i.e. from a participant interview), these quotes are from my memory and notes, and may be paraphrased.

Curriculum: Dr. Rhonda Blair's Solo Performance Course

Dr. Rhonda Blair first met Miller "in 1993 when I was vice president of conferences for ATHE. This was in Philadelphia," and Miller performed *My Queer Body* for the conference.

I remember standing just inside the door of the ballroom where Tim was going to be doing *My Queer Body*, and I don't know that I had seen the video at this point? But I knew there was going to be nudity and the whole thing. And in this hotel in the middle of downtown Philadelphia, so I stood inside the door and there's hundreds of ATHE members sitting there and Tim's doing *My Queer Body*, including, you know, getting naked and sitting on the lap of a man in the first row who's in his nice professor suit and all of that. But I'm standing by the door hoping . . . keeping the wrong sort of people out of the room. And so then I got to meet Tim afterwards. (Blair Interview)

Several years later, when Miller was scheduled for a performance in Dallas in March 1999, Blair invited him to teach a workshop at SMU. Since then, his annual visit has been scheduled around

and integrated into the solo performance course curriculum in the fall. “Tim has always come five to seven or eight weeks into the semester for a two day workshop” (Blair Interview).

Miller’s visits are funded directly by the Theatre division: “The chair Stan Wojewodski has said to me more than once just how important it is to have Tim come and do these” (Blair Interview).

The solo performance class, “Studies in Contemporary Performance: Solo Performance,” taught by Blair, was created as a Theatre elective, got cross listed with Cultural Formations (an SMU general education curriculum category), and is also listed as an Honors class. The Honors component gives Blair “permission to sort of lift the bar a bit for them in terms of expectations around critical thinking and academic writing” (Blair Interview). The course blends more traditional academic endeavors (weekly readings, discussion, and essay responses) with a performance component.

Blair’s Fall 2014 syllabus includes readings from Marvin Carlson, Richard Schechner, Jill Dolan, Deb Margolin, Judith Butler, Tony Kushner, and many others, paired with such videos as Anna Deavere Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*, Deb Margolin’s *Of All The Nerve*, Spalding Gray’s *Monster in a Box*, Rachel Rosenthal’s *L.O.W. in Gaia*, Reverend Billy’s *What Would Jesus Buy?*, Eddie Izzard’s *Dressed to Kill*, and Tim Miller’s *My Queer Body* (Blair, “Syllabus”). Since initially offering the course in c. 1999, the course has not changed significantly. “[W]hat changes are some of the artists and some of the readings that we look at, but the 2/3 academic, 1/3 performance-making balance has stayed pretty much the same” (Blair Interview).

For the first ten weeks of the Fall 2014 incarnation of the course, the students engaged with these readings, wrote short response essays, and composed a 3000-word research paper

addressing some aspect of the course. Blair: “the topics [for the research paper] can include a solo performer, a group of solo performers, some aspect of performance art. [. . .] Also sort of cultural and social and media and political topics through a performance studies lens” (Blair Interview). Some examples students were currently working on when I spoke with Blair included snake handling as part of a Pentecostal church service, constructions of masculinity in the media, Punch Drunk Theatre’s *Sleep No More*, and the Belarus Free Theatre.

Miller’s residency is intended to help students with the final component of the course; each student creates and performs an eight- to twelve-minute solo performance for their final project. He is usually invited somewhere in the fifth to seventh week of the semester, though his 2014 visit was at the end of the eighth week. The workshop is connected to the course, though participation is not required to enrolled students in the solo performance class, nor is participation restricted to those enrolled students. “Priority is given to members in the class for spaces, and then it’s extended to students in the division of theatre. And we usually have a good number of students not in the class who take it” (Blair Interview). The primary curricular intent of the Miller workshop, in Blair’s words, is “to help students generate possibilities for material that may inform the pieces that they make for the end of the semester.” The workshop provides additional benefits:

It’s also just a safe place to engage in community and openness and honesty and figuring out what’s up. Students need to figure out what’s up for them, and it’s a space where they can sometimes say things that they don’t feel they can say somewhere else, or a place where they realize there are things they need to say that they didn’t know they needed to say. (Blair Interview)

Beginning with week eleven of the course, students present rough drafts of their pieces for the class, after which they receive feedback from Dr. Blair and from their peers in the class. Blair asks the other students to “be supportive, be positive, tell them what you liked, tell them what you have questions about. Do not offer suggestions for what they should do, but just be sort of a positive mirror and witness for what’s going on” (Blair Interview). Blair also pairs each student with a “buddy” to “brainstorm with, and to run material by, to maybe watch a rehearsal, help run the lights or the sound or something like that, but the students don’t work in isolation. They’ve got a fellow traveler for this phase of the journey” (Blair Interview).

Part 1 (Day 1): Flash Performances, Holding Hands, Movement Exercises, and “Yes”/“No” Moments

While compressed to ten hours, the structure of the workshops at SMU is fairly consistent with other Miller-facilitated workshops, with the omission of a final performance or showing. When I participated/observed at SMU in October 2014, the first day opened with the group standing in a circle, holding hands and sharing a few sentences about something that was on our minds or particularly present for us that day, that morning. “Brian” spoke of his awareness that his future was shifting. Graduation was looming and he wasn’t sure what he would be doing next year. My thoughts were in a similar vein; I spoke of being unsure what the next year or two would hold and balancing the fear and excitement of those question marks. Someone brought up the recent Ebola cases in Dallas; the first patient diagnosed in the United States had died in a hospital four miles away from the SMU campus ten days before the workshop. Relationships were also on the minds of several of the students; “Matthew” spoke of

the difference between loving someone and being in love with someone as a question he had been particularly conscious of.

Miller then led the group through a series of movement exercises and flash performances; the group spread out over the entire room and took one step with their collective left feet over fourteen seconds, walked around the room at high speed reciting everything they had consumed in the past twenty-four hours, ran from one end of the room to the other envisioning the thing they feared most chasing them and screaming, snowboarded while singing an opera composed of Italian food names, and walked shoulder-to-shoulder across a room, barefoot over broken glass, while faking orgasm. Miller asked for suggestions, and the group created a new flash performance that involved washing dishes while vomiting, dodging machine gun fire, and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

After these movement exercises, Miller led the group through a performance creation prompt involving the memory of a time we said “No,” “Yes,” or otherwise stood up to authority and claimed our own, imagining what color is present in this moment or what it tastes like. Some of the colors the group called out were “Frat Boy Blue” and “I Know I’m Hurting You Green.”

“James”: Move This Conversation Somewhere Else / I love cock!

An example of a short performance that arose from this prompt comes from “James,” who used the opportunity to performatively re-tell a confrontation that had happened to him on campus about five months before the workshop. He had been sitting on a bench with a friend discussing how he was moving on after a relationship had ended.

And there was this guy who came out after we were sitting down, and he was wearing a jacket, like a very frat boy dark blue jacket, smoking a cigarette, and he turned to me and he said, "I don't really care what you faggots do during the day, but can you move this conversation somewhere else." And I was like, that was my first time that I had ever, in a derogatory way, been called a faggot. And also it was so nonchalant, that I was like, "Whoa." And I have a habit of letting things slide, but I was like, I've been dumped, and here I am. So I turned to him and I said, "Actually, I was here first. So you can move if you want to, but I'm gonna stay here and I'm gonna keep speaking at the same volume I was talking, and you can just deal with it." And he said, "You're an asshole." And I turned to him, and I said, "Yes. Yes, I am an asshole." And there was a pause where my filter was like, don't say it. And then I said it. I said, "And I love cock." [laughs]

("James")

As a performance with two other people and about seven lines of text, James sat with a friend on a bench, "doing a bunch of profane actions with our hands, fake sexual stuff." The third person in the vignette

hit me on my back as if he were making a gun, but poking me with it. And then I fell, and he said, "I don't care what you faggots do during the day, but can you move your conversation somewhere else?" And then I stood up, I grabbed his hand, I leaned him over, and I – as Tim said – big dog licked the side of his face all the way up. And then spun him out, and that was the end of that piece.

("James")

Part 2 (Day 1): Body Maps

The remainder of the first five-hour day was spent creating and responding to body maps. After the first round of performances, Miller walked the group through the movement mirroring and the body phrases that lead into the body mapping exercise (see Chapter 2). Once the group had spent about twenty minutes drawing their body maps, he asked them to move around them, viewing the maps from above, upside down, and to think of the metaphors present in their bodies and on their maps and to create a gesture to share with the group. After everyone had demonstrated their gesture, and Miller had introduced the prompt to add some text, we sat in a circle. Our instructions were to do the movement, commit to the movement, let that movement tell a story, then exit the circle as the entire group takes a collective breath.

“Rebekah”: My mother’s blood / My father’s eyes

“Rebekah” went first. She walked around the circle making eye contact with everyone in the room, then performed an upward spiral gesture that launched into the word “Mama” and the words, “I am my mother’s blood and my eyes are the only thing that comes from my father.” She sat down. Miller requested that she take it again and dig a little bit deeper into what that story was, to “invite us in” a little bit more. He talked for a few more moments, and then the group took a collective breath in, breath out, and Rebekah rejoined the circle and did her piece again. The second time around, she held the hands of everybody in the circle, one person at a time, before she started her piece. She again opened with the same movement phrase, then catalogued all of her features that resemble her mother, finishing with a line about the blue of her eyes is the only thing that belonged to her father.

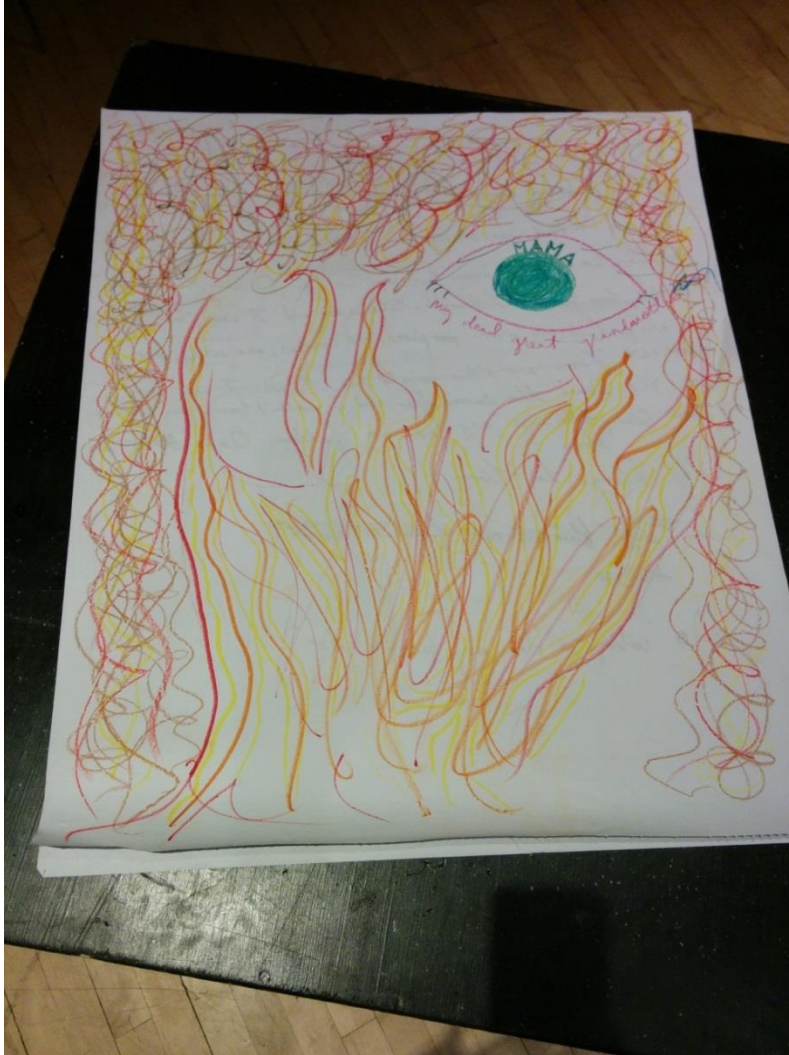


Fig. 18. Rebekah's body map. Photo by Heidi Schmidt.

The additional text in the second version of the performance weighted the inheritance significantly toward her mother; in this incarnation, the single element she credited to her father opened up questions in my imagination about whether she saw that single inheritance as a positive connection to or a negative reminder of her father, or whether she wanted more of herself to come from him, or less.

“Mark”: Egyptian Pyramid Nipples

“Mark” created a short piece about having very sensitive nipples as an adolescent. He told me after the workshop:

When I was a kid, when I was like thirteen or so, I had very tender nipples, you know, when I was a pubescent boy. And it was a thing that really scared me and surprised me, and made me feel really self-conscious and made me feel very feminine, and negatively so. And I was teased about them by my family and by – harmlessly, most of the time, but it still made me really self-conscious about them. So I kind of . . . Now, I don’t care at all. In fact, I’m proud. It’s like, whatever, you know. It’s funny that they’re there. And they don’t . . . I don’t care that they’re any different or whatever. I have no self-consciousness about them. So I drew them as two Egyptian pyramids on my body map. And I kind of looked at my body map and said, “What’s the most bizarre thing I have on there? Egyptian pyramid nipples.” So, that’s the piece that I tried to delve into, and just kind of explored that. ("Mark")

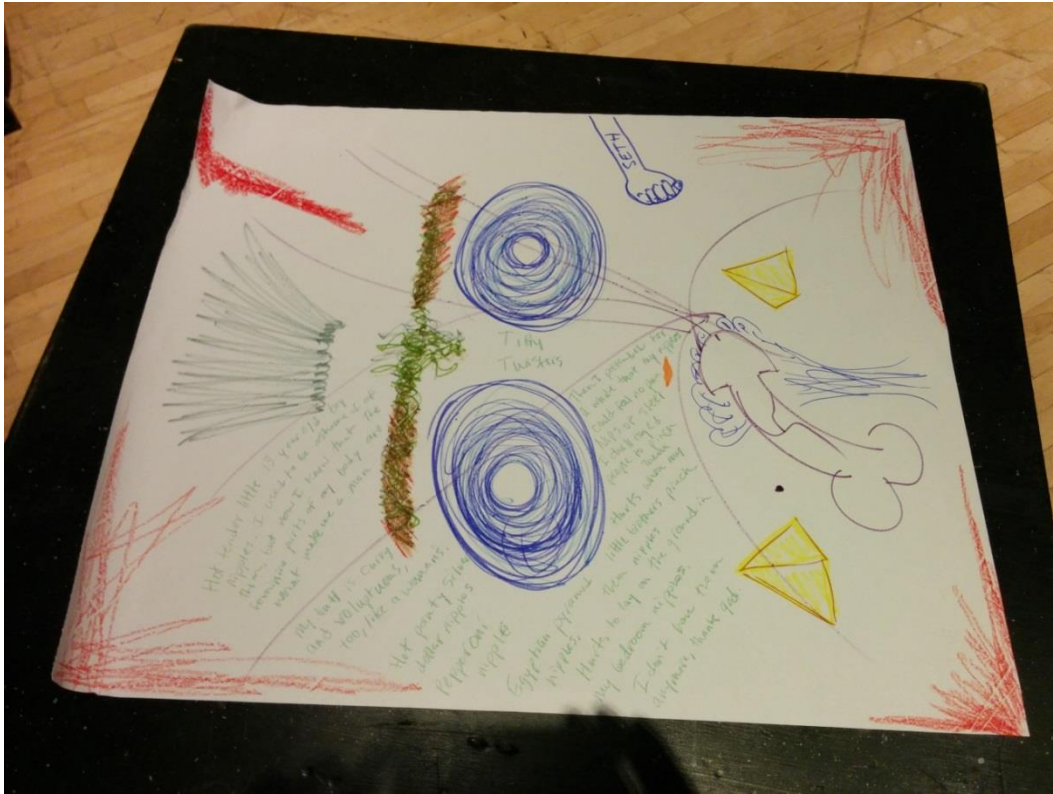


Fig. 19. Mark's body map. Photo by Heidi Schmidt.

James: 12345678

James entered the circle and began tapping different parts of his body rapidly, in succession, in 8 counts. "1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8." He continued tapping as a stream of consciousness monologue spilled out of him about hating the number three and liking the number eight, and counting things, and wanting to write things down but writing is too slow and his brain works too fast, not being able to wait for things, and afraid to miss the train and finishing with the realization that sometimes he is the train. I asked him about it after the workshop:

I like doing things in even numbers, I can't stand doing things odd, I have to touch things with both hands if I'm going to touch it with one, otherwise my

body feels imbalanced. So it's things like that. And I hopped into the circle when it was my turn, and I knew in my head, I was like . . . I have a habit of saying . . . of pre-planning, like I said before. So I was making a conscious effort not to say anything I'd already thought of, which is kind of an OCD thought to begin with. So I jumped into the circle, and I don't even think I said the words OCD, but I just talked about my psychosis and the way my brain works. And it's probably the fastest I've ever spoke ever in my entire life. And I hit so many things that I did not expect to hit that I actually have a hard time remembering what was coming out of my mouth. And after I was having a very like breath-filled, shaky experience. And that was totally okay, and it was nice to do it in a setting where there was a lot of acceptance in the room and I didn't feel crazy doing it. Or when I did feel crazy, it wasn't like, "You're crazy," it was like, "We're crazy." So that made a really safe environment for art to come out of and already be somewhat polished in a weird way. Like that was kind of its own complete piece, and if someone said, "If you could go back and change anything with it, would you change anything?" I would say, "No. And I won't perform it again." [laughs] Cause it doesn't need to, the life of that piece is done. ("James")

especially when coupled with the serene smile on her face. We spoke about that piece after the workshop, and how her sensitivity about her neck goes back to middle school. As we spoke about the piece, any time her neck was mentioned, Harper's hands moved to her neck; she spent a large portion of our interview touching it. "I kind of think of it as like the dragon's belly? It's the one spot on my body where I've always felt just too vulnerable" ("Harper"). Harper now does acrobatic partnering and weight sharing, and credits the physical trust required by that kind of work with helping her get past the vulnerability she felt around her neck. "I think I was finally able to open up to the world through that, because I was able to trust. So that's where that piece started, is . . . there's just something really beautiful about putting yourself into another person's hands, and trusting them. [. . .] It's really nice to be vulnerable with people" ("Harper"). She commented at one point that her neck had been used against her, and I asked what she meant by that.

I was sexually assaulted. [pause] He grabbed my neck to . . . you know, get what he wanted? I'm not really sure how to put this. I just wanted to do this, [she shrugs her shoulders up, burying her neck] and that was actually one of the movements that I did in the workshop, was like . . . to hide. I think I felt a lot of shame from that. I never told my parents about it, because . . . I don't know. But I felt a lot of shame from it, and there's nothing to be ashamed about. When Tim was like, "Explain it, talk about it" [immediately after she first performed it], I didn't want to talk about my sexual assault, because nothing . . . why? Why would I . . . ? I feel like art shouldn't be about sitting in the despair of it, but trying to think about what came from it, and trying to move to the light. And you

know, yeah, I didn't trust a lot because it was a good friend of mine that did that to me. There's a lot of trust issues that I had as a kid. I was fourteen. A freshman in high school. And it was a really just hard time for me. And I think I shut myself off from the world because of that. And when I started doing circus and weight sharing and dance, I opened myself up again. I used to cry a lot, and I think it was because I just missed that. I missed opening up to people. And I missed that feeling of . . . yeah, of putting yourself in other . . . you know, with other people. And I'm still very guarded, and I have walls as any human does. But it's such a relief to let them down and let other people in your life. And I think that's what the piece was really about, rather than this horrible thing happened to me. It's like this horrible thing happened, but . . . look at this, what I've learned from it. And that's what I'm really interested in. I don't care about how the phoenix became the ashes, I want to see what it becomes out of the ashes. ("Harper")

Given her reluctance to "explain" or elaborate within the workshop, I was concerned that I had pushed her to over-share, and asked if she were comfortable with me including these details about her assault in this study. She laughed as she replied, "Absolutely. 'Harper.' Harper is very comfortable with that" ("Harper").

"Maria" performed a piece about her hands feeling disembodied and not quite her own: "These are my grandmother's hands. They're not mine. I don't even know why they are attached to me – Oh, wait, except that scar. Nope, I did that." "Brian" created a piece about how he can never sit still and has never been able to sit still, and so he does a lot of stomping around, making a lot of noise, and refusing to be still. "Edward" performed a slow-motion sway

of his hips, carving out figure eights and slow circles with the motion and rejecting the limitations people want to put on the “right” way to move his hips. His hips, he said, are like the ocean, and you can’t contain the ocean. It’s the ocean that can wear down cities.

Part 3 (Day 2): Transformation

At the end of the rehearsal day Saturday, Miller sent us home asking us to reflect overnight and imagine the transformation we want to see in ourselves or in the world. Sunday morning, we began by standing in a circle, holding hands, and offering brief comments on what remained with us from the day before. Miller walked us through a guided meditation regarding those transformations and imagining where these changes might live in our bodies. In small groups, the participants asked their partners to draw an image or symbol on their bodies, then directed their partners in a brief performance of the transformation they hoped to create.



Fig. 21. An SMU student shows the symbol she asked her partners to draw on her. Photo by Heidi Schmidt.



Fig. 22. An SMU student shows the symbol he asked his partners to draw on him. Photo by Heidi Schmidt.

Mark: The Anti-Heart

Mark's next piece grew out of another element of his body map. After exploring the "Egyptian Pyramid Nipples" on Day 1:

One of the other things on my body map, . . . I drew just like a big phallus on there, pretty much in the middle of the page, of the picture, representing the overbearingness, the weight of sexuality, I guess. At least lately for me. So then for the rest of it, I kind of dove into this combat that's going on in my mind and in my emotional life between sex and love, and how are those things related, and how have I been misinterpreting them in my past few years. And that came

to be a piece about my heart, which I had somebody embody in the workshop, and then about my penis, which is something that I also had somebody embody. So I had this sort of dichotomy going on between those two. And I thought that . . . there's this spot of tension on my back that I've just been tapping into in terms of flow of energy through the body – I'm into yoga and all that stuff – so I've been focusing on that a lot lately and I decided to call that my anti-heart. I set up a conflict between all three of those things – my heart, my penis, and my anti-heart. And how do those things fight each other in the struggle between what is love, what is anxiety, what is sex, what is lust, etc. etc. ("Mark")



Fig. 23. Mark displays his "anti-heart." Photo by Heidi Schmidt.

The Spectrum

Next, we played for a while with an exercise I call “The Spectrum.” Miller does not always name it; “sometimes I call it ‘this side-that side,’ he told me via email (Miller, “SMU”). The space is organized into two opposite ends. Miller calls out various pairings of opposite characteristics, and the workshop participants place themselves at either end of the spectrum. Dog people to the left, cat people to the right, for example. As the exercise continued, Miller mentioned he had developed this exercise at SMU, and had used it within a performance for the first time at the University of Colorado Boulder in *Litmus* (see Chapter 4). He has since incorporated it into several performances with full audience participation.

Part 4 (Day 2): Free Writing

During the second half of the day, the participants were given a large piece of paper to free write, uncensored, “the structure of the piece you really need to make. Then we do the do-thru exercise where they read that with them directing their partners as physical performers” (Miller, “SMU”).

Harper: Picking and Scrutinizing

Harper created a piece that she described as coming from an interest in body issues, sexual identity, and femininity. In responses to Miller’s prompt regarding transformation, Harper returned on Day 2 thinking about “a world in which gender is kind of thought about differently.” After The Spectrum, Miller asked the group to spread out on the floor and free write for fifteen minutes in order to create the final piece of the workshop. Harper’s free-writing sparked a memory:

We were doing the writing exercise yesterday and I wrote down a memory from middle school that I'd forgotten about, and I stopped and I looked at it, and I was like, wow, I forgot that that happened. But I was just writing and it just came out. And it was weird, but I don't think that could've happened in many other workshops because [Tim] created such an environment for us to feel comfortable and safe. And the hand holding really brought us in and made us one. And yeah, we were able to share a lot of really vulnerable aspects of ourselves and our lives, and I think Tim was the reason for that. He really created the space that could foster that sort of work, which was great. ("Harper")

Her free-writing generated a piece about challenging stereotypes of embodied femininity. Harper describes herself as "muscular" and "very strong."

But a strong female's not supposed to be a strong female, she's supposed to be a dainty little thing. Which I am very little and dainty, but that's not how I feel on the inside. [. . .] I've had guys be like, "Well your breasts are too small, they're just . . ." And I've struggled with that. So I guess that's where the second piece came out of, was me kind of coming to terms with the body that I have. I've always been self-conscious of my breasts because they're not really there. I check them in the morning to make sure they haven't run away. [short pause] But you know, it is a feminine body. ("Harper")

In the piece that grew from this impulse, Harper stood very still, reading her free-writing about developing breasts before other girls, who called her a slut because of them. Then she tried to hide them, and they called her a prude. Throughout the piece, her scene partners (both

male) touched, rubbed, groped, and picked at her body while she read, appearing emotionally detached from their roving hands. She continues:

I just asked them to invade my personal space. And at first, they were nuzzling me a lot. And I was like, that's not what I was . . . that's not what I'm thinking. I wanted them to pick at me and to scrutinize me. Sometimes that's how I feel like men's gazes are. And obviously, that's prejudicial point of view. [laughs] But it's like, "What's this part of you?" and "What's this part?" And one of them lifted up my shirt. And I talked about my breasts a lot in the piece, and I asked them whenever I said that word to grab my breasts. [. . .] And it kind of bounced off [Holly]'s piece, actually now that I'm thinking about it – she did the piece that was like, "What kind of woman are you?" Slut, prude, and there's no way to win. ("Harper")

Harper's hope was to juxtapose a text explaining that "this shouldn't be happening" with the reality that "this is happening, of them touching me, grabbing at me" ("Harper"). As a spectator in the room, I found that juxtaposition effective; it was alternately beautiful and disturbing.

James: The Monkey & Mary Beth

James' scene partners sat down with the other spectators, and he stood alone in the stage area, speaking in a Southern accent as a woman he named Mary Beth. Mary Beth introduced a very special guest, or pet, that she had for her audience today. From my perspective, it felt very much like the introduction of a freak show, or some sort of exoticized exhibition (bringing to mind Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco's *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* tour of natural history museums [Fusco]). James then changed personas

into the “guest.” He squatted down into an animal-like posture, and threw out a few short sentences expressing interest in hobbies associated with gay stereotypes. When he shouted out “football!” however, one of his partners in the audience made a “bzzz” sound, and James fell over, stunned. Next up: “Interior design!” No buzzer. The piece continued for another minute or so, with exclamations that challenged gay stereotypes by aligning with more traditional masculine interests resulted in James being zapped, while those stereotypically coded as gay earned a reprieve.

This piece emerged from the performance he had created earlier that day. During Sunday’s first round of performances, James had spoken of resisting stereotypes, and finished his piece with the line “I don’t want to wear this identity anymore,” removed his shirt, put it on me. He lifted me under my arms to put me in his place inside the circle wearing his shirt, while he sat in my position. In our interview the next afternoon, James confirmed that this Sunday morning piece was the first stab at what became the afternoon Mary Beth/monkey piece.

This is actually sort of what I’ve been talking about the whole time of feeling like a monkey in my thoughts because I’m orchestrating how I have to think, and I’m orchestrating how much time, and I’m feeling like a monkey with the homosexual . . . oh, what did Tim call it? The . . . the . . . gay minstrelsy. ("James")

Tim Miller’s Mentorship of SMU students and alumni

I asked Dr. Rhonda Blair what she had observed in terms of Miller’s relationship to the students and to the permanent faculty, in context of his role as a recurring visiting artist. She responded:

The fact that Tim returns year after year after year and the students who attend talk to the students who haven't yet, sets up sort of a sense of Tim as a part of our community. So that as part of our community, this person who comes in and does this, gives us this wonderful gift. And as somebody who is an independent artist, he gives the students another model for how to make a living, but also how to make a life. And so . . . I think he expands their sense of possibilities for imagining what their lives as artists and citizens [can be]. (Blair Interview)

One of the ways Miller does this is in mentorship relationships he establishes with a handful of students from SMU. The day before the workshop began, Tim Miller and SMU alumnus Brigham Mosley offered an informal "conference hour" for any interested students. They spoke and answered questions about the workshop itself, internships, mentorship, moving to New York after graduation (or not), etc. Mosley encouraged the students to take part in the workshop: "It will change your life. Seriously. It set the course for my work. Rhonda and the workshop. Solo performance led to Tim led to career" (Miller and Mosley). The two first met when Mosley was an undergraduate student in SMU's Theatre program and signed up for Miller's workshop while enrolled in Blair's solo performance course. Mosley jumped at the chance to repeat the workshop the following year (despite having been released from the hospital after a bout of tonsillitis the day the workshop began). Since Mosley's graduation from SMU in 2010, Miller has continued to mentor Mosley, who recently moved back to Dallas after four years as a solo performer in New York.

I spoke to him about his experience at SMU and Miller's influence on his career. He told me that while a student at SMU, he struggled to find a niche in a program that favored "golden age American theatre," Ibsen, and Chekhov (Mosley).

There's just a frustration, I felt like, with the queer boys and girls. And there were like four or five in every class. And Rhonda's solo performance class seemed to be where all of them gravitated towards. And from there it just opened up this new type of performance, and then Tim would be brought in, and I think all of us who felt in any way an outsider in the program latched on to him. I know I did. But, I mean, I feel like he still has a pulse on people who graduated before me. And he asks about people who graduated ten years ago. He has this . . . benevolent spirit, this mentorship that's just part of him. He's guided so many of us. And then every year there are three or four diehard Tim Miller students that he can find places for in the world. He has that skill. That was my experience. And I think the program here has changed, it's gotten a little more adventurous and experimental. There are a lot of new professors since I left. I still think that queer, outsider, loner finds a place in Rhonda's class and Tim's workshop. (Mosley)

He describes the solo performance class as

probably the most important class I took when I was at SMU. It just sort of really opened up the ideas for me of what performance could be. I'm from small town Oklahoma. Very rural. And I just didn't know what theatre could be, what performance could be. Even now, I don't consider myself an actor. I consider

myself a writer/performer. And I consider what I do to be performing, because I'm performing myself. Even when I'm performing Scarlett O'Hara, it's Brigham as Scarlett O'Hara. But it's from that class that I felt like the permission was given. And that it was celebrated. (Mosley)

Miller advised Mosley to apply for an internship at PS 122 immediately upon his graduation. "I was so struck with Brigham five and six years ago when I first met him here at SMU. And we kept communicating. [. . .] I was thinking, 'Okay, how can I help the trajectory of the amazing solo performance community at SMU as it launches into New York City?'" (Miller and Mosley). Mosley interviewed within his first few weeks in New York, and got the internship, which led to an official mentorship opportunity a few months later. PS 122 sponsored the mentorship program in which three performers would develop pieces under Miller's supervision, and would premier them along with Miller at PS 122 at the end of a six-month development process. While Miller "didn't get to choose who was in it," he was confident the internship would benefit Mosley in the mentorship selection process. Miller: "That felt like a really successful engagement of how the work we do at SMU of other colleges and universities, how that starts to graduate you, as you graduated in the professional world. [. . .] These [mentorship slots] were very, very competitive. [. . .] Two out of the three of the emerging performer mentees were SMU recent graduates [Brigham Mosley and Kamelle Mills]" (Miller and Mosley).

During the six-month mentorship, Mosley developed a piece he described as a "narrative of cowardice" about his American Indian ancestors "who passed for white, so they

became white people around statehood in Oklahoma.” Near the end of the mentorship, Mosley’s grandfather died unexpectedly and he returned to Oklahoma.

Those were my granddad’s grandparents. [When he passed away,] the argument of [the piece] became very mean, and very cruel. So I just changed the piece, and Tim would check in every day. And it became this piece that was Rodgers & Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!*, and these dream ballets with my granddad, and then these ancestors, these great- greats, and this whole idea of identity, and identity through grief, and *Oklahoma. Oklahoma!* with dream ballets. And songs. And all that good stuff. But it was this period of really intense trauma because my family is so close. And I just can’t say enough about Tim. He would just check in all the time, and took complete pressure off in this way that, you know . . . [he] just let something become something else, and to be very present in that. The piece I made, *Oh What a Beautiful Mo[u]rnin’* – and then it became *Mo[u]rnin After* later. But it’s the show that I’ve done the most, that Tim has opened so many doors for. (Mosley)

As previously noted, Miller prioritizes the concerns most present to him when creating his own work, and encourages the same in the students he works with. Miller’s support of a significant change in direction for Mosley’s performance seemed entirely consistent to me. Mosley agreed:

That’s what I learned from him, too, is that performance can change immediately. And the great thing about solo performance is that it’s immediate, and you can be in the moment and you can have a conversation with the

audience and be in the room and let those things change you. [. . .] “You need to write this piece that’s in the front of your brain.” And I did. [. . .] He’s just not scared of things being messy, and he really encourages mess, and diving in deep. And in the moment. [. . .] “What’s the juiciest bit?” [laughs] I feel like that’s always been the case. “What’s immediate? What’s right here?” (Mosley)

Miller also commented on the *spatial* immediacy of Mosley’s *Mo[u]rnin’ After* now that Mosley has moved from New York back to Dallas:

But there is that space also, where suddenly if the work you’re doing . . . like your show about Oklahoma, about your grandfather’s death, about you as a young gay Oklahoma guy . . . Doing that piece in Dallas is going to be a whole other experience than it is doing it in New York City. Suddenly you actually know where Oklahoma is, it’s really close to Dallas, there’s lots of Oklahomans here. There is also that thing, when we perform – and this was true for me as a young artist, someone who came of age right as – a twenty-year-old – right as the AIDS crisis was arriving, doing pieces, the audience urgency was so strong. [. . .] It’s work that’s speaking to something that’s scaring us, that’s exciting us, that speaks to who we are, that’s a piece we need to see. (Miller and Mosley)

Miller also pushed Mosley to acquire teaching experience, and scheduled the PS 122 mentees to lead workshops. Mosley: “From there, I was able to start shopping this piece that I’d made along with the workshop that I’d taught to different universities and to different cities. So I was able to take this show that came out of working with Tim on the road. [. . .] Tim has helped me

with every project, and he's read every script that I've done. My career has hinged on him and Rhonda's class" (Mosley).

Brigham Mosley is not the only SMU alumnus with an ongoing working relationship with Miller; he was, however, the most readily available for purposes of this study. Miller and Blair both cited a previous mentee of Miller's, Ian MacKinnon, who first worked with Miller as an SMU student during Miller's first SMU workshop and has since gone on to have a significant role with Highways in Los Angeles. Tim Miller (during the conference hour):

Ian MacKinnon, who was a student here at SMU, in Meadows, is I think now probably the most influential performer and curator in the city of Los Angeles, largely out of the materials that Rhonda got engaged with him, the close connection he and I made. I encouraged him to join the circus and come to LA. He came, and now he's really the person organizing the most amazing events. His own work is incredibly extraordinary, so in some ways I feel I've had a fifteen-year mentorship with him. (Miller and Mosley)

Blair (in our interview):

And [the workshop] ends up changing the lives of some students in really good ways. This goes back to the first workshop Tim did here. In developing relationships with students that sometimes continue beyond their graduation and afterwards. Ian McKinnon was a student here, and took the workshop, and then when he graduated he went out to LA, and he's worked with Tim at Highways, and he's now doing a lot of running and management of Highways. (Blair, Interview)

Conclusion

When I spoke with them the day after the workshop, Harper and James both commented on how helpful the workshop had been in helping them distill their ideas for their solo performance class final. Harper told me that “I feel like I’ve already written half of my solo performance, which is a wonderful feeling, especially right now. Things are picking up. But I don’t think I’ll throw away anything that I did at the workshop” (Harper). James began the workshop ready to confront the idea of time for his performance project.

And then we got split into groups, and I’m on this wheel of “I’m talking about time.” And then what came out of me was not about time. Again. I was like, “I didn’t fucking talk about what I wanted to talk about.” And then I kind of realized after that exercise was done, that I was talking about what I wanted to talk about, and time was more of the vehicle. And now my solo performance is a lot stronger. (“James”)

After the workshop, James described the piece he’s working on as “me trying to do an hour long show in ten minutes that deals with gay issues. And that’s what I’ve wanted to say the whole time. [. . .] This workshop helped me realize this is what I’m talking about, and it’s okay to talk about this, and it doesn’t matter how many times it’s been done” (James).

This year was Mark’s third Miller workshop at SMU, and feels “somehow equipped” to continue creating solo performance as a result of the class and the workshops.

I think that’s almost solely because of Tim’s work and his kind of mentoring of my work, and his encouragement to me that I’m doing strong work and that the stories that I’m telling need to be told. I don’t think I’d feel so confident about

possibly doing this in the future as I do without Tim and his workshop here. [. . .]

For me, knowing that he holds SMU in such high esteem, it makes me want to be all the more giving to him in his workshop. Just the fact that he comes here every year, for year after year, you know. It makes me want to give the same level of passion that he has. ("Mark")

Harper appreciated the progress she made on her final solo performance, but was even more grateful for Miller's ability to help her zero in on the one thing she needed to express that day, or that weekend:

I think that's the biggest thing that I got out of this workshop was not even so much generating my material, which was still exceedingly helpful, but just trying to understand what in myself needs to come out and trying to find those places, like the anti-heart that needs to be talked about, and breasts that need to be talked about. I sometimes think that's the hardest thing, is trying to figure out what that black hole in you that you need to talk about to fill it back up again. And so I think that's the biggest thing with Tim's workshop, is he's just like find it, find that thing, find that thing. ("Harper")

This majority of this case study has focused on documenting and narrating the progression of one specific weekend workshop and the experiences of the students involved. Several of the student responses comment on the ways the weekend helped prepare them to successfully complete the performance piece assigned in the class. The full scope of Miller's and Blair's collaboration over the past fifteen years, however, extends beyond the final projects created by the students in the class. Miller credits Blair and her solo performance class as

significant contributors to the larger world of performance, and with empowering students to expand the traditional definitions of roles within the theatre:

I would actually say Rhonda's class, her personal performance class, has changed the direction of performance in this country because it's graduated so many SMU students over the course of the many, many years, that have then gone on in New York and Chicago and Los Angeles to actually go – to see that actually as the work they want to do. Along with being an actor and director. (Miller and Mosley)

In Chapter 4, I noted that including *Litmus* in the performance season at the University of Colorado Boulder legitimized devised performance within that program; the existence and ongoing success of Blair's solo performance course at SMU similarly elevates and validates this style of performance within her program. It also offers a model for institutions interested in teaching their students performance creation methods (beyond traditional playwriting courses), arts entrepreneurship, histories of performance, etc. For her part, Blair sees Miller's annual workshop as a "crucial" contribution to the success of the solo performance class.

For me, the workshop is a crucially important aspect of the class. [. . .] Even though it's not a required element of the class, there are always enough people in the class who take it, who participate in it, that it kind of infects everything. And it really puts the body into the work in a way that isn't easily done by other means. There's something about the intensity of ten hours over two days, and the way that Tim sets up the safety of the space, that shifts things with the students – I would say almost all the students in the workshop – that shifts

things for the students in crucial ways as they think about moving into creating their work. And also their understanding of performance, and also their thinking about themselves as human beings, citizens, someone with the right to take up space. (Blair Interview)

Blair's final comment here brings us back to one of the six categories of analysis I proposed in Chapter 1: that the performance of self is an act of claiming individual identity and initiating transformation, and (in Miller's words) "the act of telling is an act that imagines you have some kind of agency or power, because it means there's something worth telling, and also that it's worth listening to" (Miller, *Beds* 260).

In the final chapter of this study, Chapter 6, I will revisit these six elements (the body as memoir of personal and family history; the performance of self as an act of claiming individual identity and initiating transformation; the immediacy of the personal narratives generated in Miller's work; the minimal performance style most suited to it; the relationship between these workshops and the goals and curricula of the universities and colleges where Miller most frequently teaches; and the importance of Miller's generosity as facilitator and his faith in the capacity for each group he works with to tell powerful, beautiful stories that need to be told) and how they have played out in the case studies just concluded. I will also offer suggestions for further research into the theoretical implications of Miller's pedagogy, explore the potential for controversy to emerge in the course of his performance creation workshops, and open the door to additional contexts in which Miller's teaching work can be considered.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In a conference panel in 2014, Miller told a story of a young man he worked with in South Carolina, who

did a piece about being a queer Muslim fat kid at [his school]. That piece has never been done – I don't think that piece has been done anywhere, ever. I've never seen that piece that [he] did. And the energy and intensity in the room as that moment happens, of the multiple identities around himself as a person of size, as a . . . the embodiment, the struggle around that. I don't know how many Muslim kids there are at [this school]. Not many. And he may or may not be the only queer Muslim kid. So suddenly out of our skills and our commitment as professors, as artists, as students, suddenly a queer Muslim kid is not invisible at his school. Which to me is actually no small thing. (qtd. in Coleman et al.)

Miller's phrase above, "I've never seen that piece," is a statement I've heard him make over and over again in the course of the workshops I have experienced with him. This speaks to his ongoing commitment to and belief in the uniqueness and specificity of every individual within his workshops and the value of the voices and stories he makes visible. The visibility of the Island of Misfit Toys, to use Miller's metaphor, is key to his pedagogy; the visibility of this ephemeral process is key to my own goals in documenting it as an underrepresented portion of his career. The documenting process has been more difficult than I expected; Miller's prompts and exercises generate a wealth of material that is by nature fleeting and ephemeral. Even when taking extensive notes or interviewing participants almost immediately after the

workshop, myriad details get lost along the way and some of the most impactful and intangible moments of performance within the rehearsal room become difficult to describe using only language (for the participants in interviews and for me as a participant, observer, and researcher). Despite these difficulties, or perhaps because of them, Miller's process is in need of further documentation and investigation.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I framed these three case studies in relationship to Tim Miller's career as a performer and activist, using six categories of analysis: the body as memoir, the performance of self, the immediacy of time and place in Miller's approach to both performing and teaching, his minimalist style, the connections to curriculum in the institutions in which he teaches, and Miller's generosity and faith as facilitator in the stories that need to be told in every room he enters as a teacher. In the following chapters, I documented and analyzed how these five elements were utilized and challenged in specific instances.

By investigating the exercises Miller uses regularly in rehearsal and workshop rooms in Chapter 2, particularly the body mapping exercise, I demonstrated the prominence of the body as repository of memory and identity in Miller's teaching work, and how those memories are used in performance to empower and claim personal identity for the workshop participants Miller works with.

In Chapters 3-5, I explored the ways Miller's use of the immediacy of time and place, and his preferred minimal performance style played out in particular workshop contexts.

Both *Litmus* at the University of Colorado Boulder and *DocumentNation* at the ATHE annual conference in Washington, D.C. allowed Miller to explore the thematic potential of the immediacy of both time and place, or to encourage the participants to engage with what was on the front burner in the *here* and *now*. *Litmus* was formulated to address the students' experiences with a presidential election in the weeks leading up to it in a specific place (a college campus in a political swing state). *DocumentNation* was performed in our nation's capital on the National Mall, adding a localized immediacy to the temporal connections between past and present inherent in the foundational documents prompt.

Litmus, at the University of Colorado Boulder, was performed as part of the academic performance season and was developed over an extended period of time. These factors provided Miller with an opportunity to expand his process and incorporate new ideas and exercises into that process. However, by casting the project alongside the other productions presented by the department that semester, possibilities of resistance were introduced that are not generally present when participants elect to join the project entirely of their own volition. The additional of technical elements also presented some challenges to Miller's usual minimalism. At the other end of the spectrum, *DocumentNation's* performance location in a public place (the Mall) and the highly compressed timeline represent a contrasting pressure on Miller and the performers to create a sufficiently developed piece for its audience.

All three projects offer insights into the curricular impact of Miller's work as a guest artist and facilitator of devised work around personal narrative. At *Litmus*, the project was partially envisioned as a supplement to existing course curriculum and production cycles; Miller was brought in to provide the students an opportunity to participate in devised work. Because

the project was performed as part of the season, *Litmus* also provided an introduction to non-traditional work to students in introductory courses as well as the general public. The responses from students in my own “Introduction to Theatre” course suggest that this type of work can be as successful in engaging its audience as more traditional scripted work. Many of the participants in *DocumentNation* are faculty in theatre and performance studies programs and took their experience with the project back to their own classrooms. Many reported increased confidence in teaching devised work as a result of participating in that process.

In several ways, Miller’s recurring role at Southern Methodist University differs from the other two case studies presented as part of this dissertation. The brief weekend workshop includes no public performance. The lack of final product (or its displacement to the solo performance class final project) allows for an entirely process-oriented workshop. The SMU workshop is also fully integrated into the department’s curriculum as a supplement to Rhonda Blair’s “Studies in Contemporary Performance: Solo Performance” course.

Miller’s involvement with the department has extended beyond the single undergraduate course. Recently a few masters students at SMU participated in the workshop, and it has generated interest in creating and including a solo performance course as part of the graduate acting program at SMU. Blair, who is teaching the graduate course as well as the original undergraduate version, told me, “it’s structured along some of the same way, and I do have them watch some of the same videos, including Tim’s. And they are expected to produce a piece that’s roughly a half hour long, as opposed to eight-twelve minutes by the end of the semester. [. . .] I’m thinking about requiring it [the workshop] for next fall, which is when I’ll be teaching it again,” rather than keeping it an optional supplement, as is the case for the

undergraduate course (Blair interview). Bill Doan mentioned that his program at Penn State is also considering adding a solo performance track to the MFA acting program, modeled to some degree on Blair's work at SMU. Doan hopes to bring Miller in on a more regular basis: "in more of a regular cycle as an intensive with our MFA actors, because we're going to be opening up a line in their curriculum for the development of solo performance and we're hoping to have Tim be a regular guest. Kind of what he does at SMU" (Doan).

In addition to teaching valuable performance skills, Miller's work also adds to students' skillsets as performance creators, directors, and producers. Working with minimal resources (often only with the bodies in the room) teaches essential skills in arts entrepreneurship and empowers students to generate and produce their own work, their own stories.

Other Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Study

Miller's Role as Visiting Artist

Throughout my research process, I have been interested in how Miller functions as a visiting guest artist in the various institutions where he facilitates student work, particularly in those institutions he visits regularly. During the "Conference Hour" presentation Miller gave with Brigham Mosley while I was on site at SMU, Miller commented on the differences between his role as a visiting faculty member and the full time faculty the students work with on more consistent basis.

What is that encounter [between a student and a visiting artist]? What happens when someone who's not a – there's clearly an important relationship with your professors and the directors your work with. But there's something about

visiting artists that can be another little kind of beautiful opening up that happens. And a different kind of connection, because we're not grading you. Brigham [Mosley] is my friend and colleague now for much longer than I encountered you as a student. Part of that is because I never gave you a grade. [laughs] (Miller and Mosley)

A few weeks later, I mentioned Miller's comment to Dr. Blair and asked for her perspective on Miller's role as a guest artist.

There are things that the students can say and reveal to him, or things that he can sort of float to them as something to think about, or to embody, or to speak, that I feel that I, as their faculty member, wouldn't want to because of faculty/student boundaries and thinking about power relations and things like that. [. . .] But the fact that Tim returns year after year after year and the students who attend talk to the students who haven't yet, sets up sort of a sense of Tim as a part of our community. So that as part of our community, this person who comes in and does this, gives us this wonderful gift. And as somebody who is an independent artist, he gives the students another model for how to make a living, but also how to make a life. And . . . so he I think expands their sense of possibilities for imagining what their lives as artists and citizens in a way that I think is different from faculty, who are here daily. (Blair Interview)

Christina Tsoules Soriano, dance faculty at Wake Forest, participated in *DocumentNation* because of her ongoing relationship with Miller due to his semi-regular visits to that university. During our interview regarding her experience with *DocumentNation*, I also

asked her if she had observed anything in particular about Miller's relationship with the program and the students as a guest artist that contrasted with the relationships and experiences students might have with resident faculty.

I feel like it's probably safe to say that a regular faculty member wouldn't be able to conduct that kind of workshop. One, because it's Tim's workshop. But two, there's definitely a different sort of safety involved with (1) speaking with someone who is known for doing this kind of work internationally, and is (2) making you feel like a really important human being in that process. How many students maybe in these workshops might reveal something about their sexuality that they've never been able to before, or a really difficult experience that happened to them as a child or something? And yet I know Tim always makes that feel, for that student, like the really important revelation or purging or cathartic experience that it is. It's never, "Uh huh, I've heard this before and here's the prescribed way to deal with it." It's always really . . . authentic and healing for everyone, and time and time again he's able to do that, which is pretty amazing. (Soriano)

My investigation of Miller's role as a visiting artist is a lesser consideration of this study and is of necessity incomplete here. It suggests, however, that a more in-depth exploration of these questions could provide an interesting addition to pedagogical and material considerations of how universities utilize contingent labor in the classroom and the rehearsal room.

Controversy as part of the overlap

The majority of responses I have received and recorded as part of this study regarding Miller's teaching methodologies have been positive, even among those who initially resisted his process and their role in it. However, one of the elements of engaging Miller's teaching work in context of his performance work is the potential for controversy that can arise. In *1001 Beds*, Miller writes of the "Battle of Chattanooga," when he performed at a small performing arts venue in 1999 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. As he notes is often the case, the controversy did not begin with a conservative church or political organization. It began when a local woman who worked with a consortium of arts organizations became concerned that Miller's presence might endanger all of their funding, and so began making some noise around his appearance. He writes:

The *Chattanooga Times* eventually ran a piece on the front page of the Sunday paper, to let everyone know who didn't already that a big gay performance artist was coming to town to frighten the horses. Just in time for Sunday sermons, the article got more folks worked up. Suddenly the congregations were roiling, the First Amendment arts supporters were sending solidarity checks, and the audience was making lots of reservations. (128)

Precautions were taken around the performance: a security guard was hired, the protestors arrived across the street with their placards, their confederate flags, and the usual epithets, and their voices could be heard from inside the theatre, which "adds an edge to the show, that's for sure" (132). Despite having received "more than my share of death threats and hate mail over the years," Miller includes this particular story in *1001 Beds* because "this

situation in Chattanooga had hit me hard. Maybe because it's the smallest city in the South that I will have ever performed in! The pressure that was being put on the theater in 1999 seemed so retro, so early culture war: obviously we are still fighting that war" (128-9). I include it in this study as an example of the kind of reactions Miller's performance work can generate and because of Miller's own conclusions about the reasons for the controversy. "The much-touted 'culture war' has been more a fight over whose voices get heard – whose memories and life story matter – than over whose money is being spent. [. . .] I often think that the culture wars come down to a civil war over memory – whose stories are going to be seen as worthy" (128, 132).

Miller was scheduled for a performance creation workshop at Villanova University in early 2012, which was cancelled by the University President, citing the "explicit, graphic and sexual content of his performances" in a statement accompanying the cancellation (qtd. in Robb). The Cardinal Newman Society claimed credit for prompting the cancellation. Miller and I discussed the situation while he was in Boulder in 2012, and he was suspicious of the reason the President cited, since Miller was not scheduled to perform as part of the residency. "We thought that would inoculate us." He continues:

They got wind of me, this extremist Catholic group, the Cardinal Newman Society, and they started trying to agitate to get me disinvited. You know, gay activist terrorist comes to Catholic university. [. . .] It was horrible. It was really ugly, and very hard on that community. [. . .] Part of it, I'm a headache. I'm clearly on the nutty Catholic radar screen, and they had success. Huge. The *Washington Post*, twenty stories in the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, they got a lot of

press, that they had been able to control what happens at that school. They got someone disinvited. [. . .] I was being naïve, because of course this kind of work brings out sexuality, it brings up feminism, it makes undergrads talk about getting raped by their state when they got an abortion and had to have a transvaginal probe, or ultrasound. These are things that do not show up in the mainstage season, but it's how the students are living. They're grappling with this stuff, and they're figuring it out. They're not trying to shut me down, I think. At Villanova. They don't really want their students talking about any of this stuff. They'd rather have it stay in *Chicago*. Which is saucy, and sassy, and brassy, it's a great show. But still contained, still super disciplined, and old, and mainstream. [. . .] It was probably, from their point of view, to control and limit speech at Villanova. You don't want the outspoken pathogen of the gay performance artist arriving. To their mind, it's like you're introducing a virus into the student body. Obviously, that's not what I think. I think you're introducing change, or ideas, and great stuff will fly out. But if you're paranoid, you'd be fearful of it. (2012 Interview)

These cancellations and controversies, while often far more public than the successful workshops, are rare. "But you know, that is such an exception. It's the only time that's happened quite in that way," Miller told me.

Faculty participation

Miller has expressed interest on several occasions in the disruptions of hierarchies and boundaries that occur when faculty members choose to participate in his workshops alongside

their students. “In some ways,” he said at a conference panel in 2014, “this devised stuff starts to blow up all of these boundaries between student, professor, professional, access. They become not peers, necessarily, but colleagues. They become people we’re going to work with, and that we’re going to work with for a long time” (Coleman et al.). Bill Doan (see Chapter 3) “started using Tim as a sounding board for my own solo work. Bouncing script ideas off of him, sharing work with him, getting his feedback, and getting mentored by him as well.” Miller was invited to facilitate a workshop at Penn State, and Doan opted to participate.

I did the full workshop when he was here at Penn State, and then I worked with him on the intensive with our MFAs as well. At first I was a little nervous because I was actually the Associate Dean for Research and a Professor of Theatre. So I still carried a dean’s title. And I thought . . . [Doan hesitates for a moment] Knowing Tim’s work and knowing what comes up during Tim’s work, I thought At first I was a little hesitant, but Tim really encouraged me and gave me examples of faculty members that participated elsewhere and how much it means to them. He also saw it as an opportunity for students at Penn State to become more aware of my work, because it wasn’t something I talked a lot about here. I was doing my work elsewhere. The workshop was a mixture of undergrads and grads and there were also non theatre majors. We had two visual arts students, we had a couple of humanities students, some undergrad theatre, some MFA theatre, I think we had a political science student in there. It was a really interesting mix. And so initially I was a little hesitant, but once we got in the workshop I just sort of let myself go. I said this to the group – I’m not

Dr. Doan, I'm not the Associate Dean, I am here as an artist interested in developing my work. When we're in here, when we're in the workshop, that's it. I'm one of you, you're one of me. That's how the week went. It was terrific. I found that students' openness to ideas and issues that I was struggling with in my work was really a powerful agent for me. So it was great. (Doan)

Judith Sebesta invited Miller to conduct workshops at both the University of Missouri-Columbia and Lamar University. She opted not to participate in the Missouri workshop:

Part of it was knowing that I would have a significant amount of work to do behind the scenes to ensure that all of the events happened. I've been a performer myself in the past, and I can't say that I have been incredibly comfortable with the notion of creating autobiographical work myself. Call it cowardly [laughs], call it thinking I don't really have the tools to do that, even while I knew that that's not required, that you don't need those. I just don't think I had the guts to put myself out there. And part of it was being in a position of – as a professor, a position of authority – I don't know if I was willing to be vulnerable in that way. And so I chose not to. Tim was fine with that. He encouraged me to participate, he said, "But if you don't feel comfortable . . ."

But when I saw the performance and I saw the power of the pieces and saw what they did for both the audience and the performer, I somewhat regretted it.

(Sebesta)

Sebesta invited Miller to conduct a workshop at Lamar University a few years later, but was prevented from participating in that workshop due to a health issue. "But I think that if I had a

chance to again, I would. Having seen what his work can give, bring, do, I think I'd like to be a part of that in that way" (Sebesta).

Theoretical Implications and Classifications

In Chapter 1, I commented that Miller's attention to the ways we store our personal and family histories within our bodies suggests a possible productive conversation with Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), and Miller references Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance* (2005) and the career of Jerzy Grotowski as influences on his performance and his teaching. Any of these avenues could provide useful frames of reference for future analysis.

Devised work

I also engaged in a preliminary review of literature regarding devised performance methodologies and histories at the onset of this study. Miller's worked certainly fits most definitions of devised work. Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt, for example, define it as a performance for which "the performance text is, to put it simply, 'written' not *before* but *as a consequence* of the process" (qtd. in Chemers 133). Most of the volumes I encountered that address devised work, however, focused almost exclusively on professional companies who collaboratively create performance pieces. The performances generated can vary in style and focus, but they rarely engage in the autobiographical. Others serve as guidebooks, documenting processes and methodologies of significant devising companies. (See Alison Oddey's *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, 1994; Sheila Kerrigan's *The Performer's Guide to the Collaborative Process*, 2001; Dymphna Callery's *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*, 2001; and Bruce Barton's *Collective Creation, Collaboration, and Devising*, 2008.) Interestingly, several of the references and entries on devised work that I came across

were included in dramaturgy handbooks (including Michael Mark Chemers' *Ghost Light*, 2010 and Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt's *Dramaturgy and Performance*, 2008). In my observation, Miller often functions as more of a dramaturg than director. He has commented many times that he considers each performer to be both actor and director of their own piece; his role is often to compile the performances into a coherent (or at least interconnected) whole. Future research and analysis could address incorporating Miller's particular approach to devised work around personal narrative into the larger conversations happening about alternative performance creation methods.

I began this research project with a conviction that Tim Miller's decades as a teacher and facilitator are invaluable contributions to students in institutions of higher education invested in training theatre practitioners and scholars. The intervening four years have only reinforced that conviction. Miller's work empowers those who participate, honors and values the individuality of their experiences, and provides a forum to engage productively with difficult topics and stories. I will close with Miller's own conception of why his work has had such success in academic contexts.

Partly why people invite me to do these so much and where I go back again and again, is because the real residual effects are deepened performers, more confident performers, issues engaged in the community that needed to be engaged, new ensembles fling out, people who had not been thriving in the marketplace of casting – the people of color, the women, the people who aren't height/weight proportionate, and the gay kids, who are generally the last to be cast – suddenly they're often the ones that really thrive in this kind of work.

Which to me just means, if we're not staging the plays that actually are using the people we've got in our program, then we'd better come up with other ways for them to really flourish. (2012 Interview)

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