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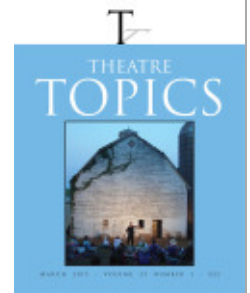
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## **Bootleg Education: Para-Pedagogical Experimentation Outside the University Setting**

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# Bootleg Education: Para-Pedagogical Experimentation Outside the University Setting

*Joanne Zerdy and Will Daddario*

Listen to this (from Goat Island's "Letter to a Young Practitioner"):

You understand who you are.  
You understand who you could be.  
You understand the gap between the two.  
Sometimes, you close the gap.  
You become who you might be.  
You experience this for a moment.  
What if we call that moment: "the classroom"? (246)

Consider these words, offered to young practitioners by former Chicago-based performance collective Goat Island, as a presentation of the "classroom" as a materialist utopia. Removed from its daily connotation signifying a place within the walls of an academic institution, the "classroom" becomes a no-place. To transpose "classroom" from a location to a generative duration through which future and present combine, the young practitioner must transform herself from passive recipient of knowledge to active producer of meaning. The act of producing an understanding of who you might be, then, constitutes a materialist utopian gesture, but one perhaps best understood by anthropologist Stuart McLean, who, borrowing from Oscar Wilde's thoughts in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," views utopias as "one means of contributing to the realization of [a new world], not through speculative gestures of escapism but by performing new realities into being" (123). That is, for Wilde and McLean, utopian thinking yields no fruit by remaining at the level of abstract idealism; instead, to think the world anew, one must enact a temporal jump by living in the present as one would hope to live in the (more perfect) future. Goat Island's injunction brings this political message to the body of the student and the space of the classroom while also placing the power of subjective change firmly in the hands of the learner, not the schoolmaster.

This spirited redefinition of classroom, however, once projected onto the lived experience of teaching and learning in the halls of higher education, reveals a particular failure. For while this new classroom has the potential to reinvigorate the practice of learning and to reframe the mission of cultivating critical-thinking and self-reflexive citizens of the world, it precisely *does not* describe the typical classroom space in, say, American colleges and universities. Projected onto the classroom spaces in which *we* (Joanne and Will) teach, Goat Island's materialist utopian proposition reminds us that the commodification of advanced education, with its emphasis on quantifiable learning outcomes, frequently fails to help students understand the gap between who they are and who they might be, and to perform the union of those two states. Instead, the disjunction between administrative desires for glowing graduation rates and other shiny statistics and pedagogical desires for renewed, enhanced, and enriched critical thinking frequently leads to a bifurcated student identity: torn between finishing school in a timely fashion so as (ostensibly) to get a job and pursuing a life of experimental and exploratory thinking leading who knows where.

Several scholars and organizations have dedicated their time and energy to addressing this problem. In 2008, in the pages of *Theatre Topics*, Branislav Jakovljevic, Wade Hollingshaus, and Mark Foster reflected on their roles in a year-long study of an overcrowded classroom. The title of the article speaks to their findings: “Financialization of Education: Teaching Theatre History in the Corporatized Classroom.” Articulated through a series of blog posts generated during the year following the study, each author offers observations to substantiate the heft of their title. Hollingshaus, then a graduate-student teaching assistant, writes that “what I want most from liberal education—to revel in thought—continues to become more and more obscured by the material demands of financialization. It seems as though liberal education has been forsaken for technical training. Grades and careers come before thought” (71). Foster, then an undergraduate teaching assistant, comments on a similarity between his experience communicating with students via the web-CT online platform used in the class and the argument made by David Noble in his essay “Digital Diploma Mills, Part 1: The Automation of Higher Education”: namely, that corporate sponsorship has pervaded the very software that mediates interactions between teacher and student. This invisible mediation means that “students are unknowingly absorbing and perpetuating more corporate initiatives,” and this fact “doesn’t really seem to be resulting in increased student learning” (72). Jakovljevic, the course’s instructor, echoes this concern in his statement that “[t]he main source of student passivity and disengagement is not the lecture format, and not even the overcrowded classroom. The core problem is in the students’ status. Namely, students are not only learners, but also purchasers of skills and of degrees. They are customers. What is passive in the classroom is not a student, but a customer” (78).

These astute critiques, developed through a year-long empirical study authorized and supported by the University of Minnesota, resonate with many works, such as the essays gathered in *Towards a Global Autonomous University: Cognitive Labor, the Production of Knowledge, and Exodus from the Educational Factory* (2009) by the Edu-factory Collective, and the upcoming (March 2015) symposium at the University of Maryland, “Subverting Academia and Subversive Academics: Papers, Installations, Performances, Manifestos, and Workshops.” For at least seven years, then, researchers have forecasted, reported on, and sought to critique the corporate takeover of higher education in order to imagine and manifest a new world for teachers and learners.

Administrators and pedagogues seeking to encourage emancipated, student-driven learning would benefit from reflecting on these works, and specifically on Goat Island’s redefinition of the classroom. But while we are in the process of redefining keywords, let us also reconsider “failure.” There has been an explosion of exciting scholarship on failure and theatre and performance studies during the last several years. From Sara Jane Bailes’s *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* to the Whitechapel anthology edited by Lisa Le Feuvre, those of us working at the crossroads of performance and philosophy have been stimulated to theorize Samuel Beckett’s line from *Worstward Ho!*—“Try Again. Fail Again. Fail Better”—along pedagogical lines, as well as to think how, in our daily classroom exercises, “[the] very condition of art-making makes failure central to the complexities of artistic practice and its resonance with the surrounding world” (La Feuvre 12). As this recent scholarship has attested, “failure,” ripped from its function within the language of assessment, can become a generative *space*. Margaret Werry and Róisín O’Gorman’s words in “The Anatomy of Failure” suit this conversation particularly well: “Failure’s threshold is also an opening, a crucial, often painful state of imagination. After the familiar, bleak, heavy vacancy, that bottom-punched-out-of-my-world emptiness recedes, something new happens. (Maybe)” (106). In other words, the failure of higher education to compose a classroom in tune with Goat Island’s proposition presents, simultaneously, a shortcoming *and* a point of entry into a new pedagogical terrain. But the “and” is important, just as important as the “maybe,” since Bailes, Le Feuvre, and Werry and O’Gorman all remind us that ambivalence constitutes a structural pillar of failure. To practice failure does not mean to set out to fail (since what happens if you succeed at that endeavor?); rather, the redefinition of failure with the support of this recent scholarship acts at best as a goad to rethink our perhaps habitualized acceptance of the language of assessment (for example, “excellence”) and to press forward into new pedagogical terrains outside the limits of institutionalized academic space.

This essay reflects on an instantiation of Goat Island's *détournement* of the classroom (to borrow a term from the Situationist movement) linked intimately to failure, understood in the sense offered above.<sup>1</sup> From September to December 2012 we facilitated what we called a "bootleg class on listening" with former and one current University of Minnesota students. Although not explicit at the time, we have come to realize that during those months, we were working in tandem with McLean's notion (via Wilde) of "performing new realities into being." Our class retained some familiar elements of university education: students/learners, teachers/facilitators, assignments given and completed, group discussions. However, as we will elaborate, we aimed to place on equal footing with the content of our class the self-reflexive processes of thinking about thinking and learning about learning so as to help students and facilitators alike to close the gap between who we were and who we might become.<sup>2</sup> The following pages present "Bootleg: On Listening" as an argument for creating para-pedagogical encounters outside, and in parallel position to, the university. To borrow from playwright Naomi Wallace's manifesto "On Writing as Transgression," transgressive learning is learning "that encourages students to write against their 'taught' selves and to engage, as bell hooks puts it, in the kind of 'self-transgression' and 'critical awareness of self' that will enable them to become, as John Donne suggests, 'citizens of the world'" (100). Our claim is that emancipatory teaching and learning, what Wallace and hooks refer to as "transgressive learning," are now only possible through a feedback loop in which the discipline of academia informs experimental investigations away from codified institutions, which, in turn, generate insights that filter back into and refresh the discipline of academia. We propose that this feedback loop constitutes something like the soundtrack to the scene of encounter envisioned by Goat Island.

Briefly, however, we feel that it is necessary to mark the nonlinear temporality of the reflections in this essay. Similar to the thoughts in "Financialization of Education," the ideas that follow are finding their way into print more than two years after the initial bootleg experience. At the time of the class, we had no specific "objective"; indeed, "learning outcome" was a phrase that never once entered our minds as we intuited our way through the makeshift semester. Neither did we (Joanne and Will) consider the work we were undertaking as beneficial to our careers as university professors and researchers. We did not attempt to take a novel theoretical approach to the practice of performance studies through the auditory; we did not want any of the students to learn some specific skill; we did not even think of the class as work.

In the present (that is, this moment of writing), however, we can make some statements with certainty. We wanted the bootleggers to stop and think about listening, both as a specific auditory act and as a general practice of attentiveness. We felt it was important to increase attentiveness so as to cultivate an examined life and construct a *tekhné tou biou* (art of life, of existence). Finally, we recognize in the present that multiple privileges allowed us to undertake the experiment in the first place. The labor of a university professor, which no doubt amounts to a continuous string of teaching, administrative, and scholarly assignments, provides ample flexibility compared to the average forty-hours plus workweek. Thus, we could make time for bootleg on the weekends, between our teaching and writing work and the students' employment schedules. But the materialist utopian classroom that we attempted to devise through this bootleg experiment was in no way dependent on the ample "free time" of either our students or ourselves. As Theodor Adorno claimed: "In a system where full employment in itself has become the ideal, free time is the unmediated continuation of labor and its shadow" (173). Free time, in other words, may no longer exist as a possibility. What made bootleg possible was the gesture of each of us to make time and space to encounter one another despite other obligations, and to undertake the labors of thinking and learning as though they were our only jobs.

## Bootleg: On Listening

At the end of the summer of 2012, I (Joanne) was looking forward to a year away from academia to focus on writing projects, after holding various teaching positions at five very different institutions since 2009. Will was anticipating another year of teaching theatre history and dramatic literature to undergraduate theatre majors at the University of Minnesota, when he received a request from a former student who had since graduated. This student, Justin, asked Will to teach a bootleg class on a topic of Will's choosing, for Justin and some other recent graduates that he would assemble. Justin had taken part in an earlier bootleg class, taught by University of Minnesota graduate student Carra Martinez, who had been preparing to teach a university course on autotheatre. Autotheatre, a mode of performance-making in which "audiences" receive instructions to make performance themselves, was an ideal experimental course to teach outside of the university. Martinez met with a handful of students late in the evenings during the 2011–12 academic year to work through her proposed syllabus.<sup>3</sup>

During Martinez's class, the term *bootleg* served many functions, but was, in part, adopted to highlight the furtive nature of the educational experiment. The word itself goes back to the 1630s to indicate, not surprisingly, the leg of a boot. By the late 1800s in the United States, it transitioned from meaning a place to hide knives and pistols to the trick of concealing a flask of liquor from view. While the bootleg class facilitated by Martinez took place at night, our class generally met on Saturday afternoons in the dining room of Justin's apartment, several miles away from the university campus. This location suggested that we too were trying to conceal the act of learning from an educational institution. Will and I regarded this informal teaching/learning environment as an exciting opportunity to work with six students who now felt ready to engage in the active work of learning. I say "now" to indicate that for many of them, the desire to learn (learn more, learn about learning) manifested *after* they had received a university diploma. For most of them, university was something to get through, a place to graduate from. They had not experienced it—on the whole—as an environment in which dynamic, creative, self-motivated, self-reflexive, scholarly learning emerged week after week.

After speaking to Justin, we proposed that we co-facilitate a class "on listening" in order to pursue an underdeveloped "performance of listening." Will wondered, for example, how much the Greek word *theatron*, the seeing place, has influenced our present-day understanding of theatre practice. The origins of the word *theatre* notwithstanding, ancient Greek performance relied heavily upon the musical abilities of playwrights, the diction of actors, and the ability of audiences to interpret the interplay between the meaning of each play's explicit argumentation and the nuanced inflection of a text's rhythms. Our weekly class meetings lasted from one-and-a-half to two hours and occurred during a span of time that roughly paralleled a fall semester. The following questions became a helpful refrain as we selected reading materials, developed listening exercises, and facilitated conversations: How do we listen? To what do we listen? What processes are involved in listening? How might we differentiate listening from hearing? What is the relationship between active listening and active learning and teaching? Can we distinguish the act of listening from the act of attentiveness?

We began and ended each class with several minutes of silence, a ritual that required each of us to notice subtle environmental sounds and our bodies' responses to them, as well as to focus our attention on what we would be—or had been—discussing in class. Our first class commenced with a listening experiment. With eyes closed, we listened to "Close to the Edge" (1972), an eighteen-minute song by progressive rock icons, Yes. Minimal instructions guided this activity: when we found our minds thinking about something other than the sounds emerging from the speakers, we were to refocus our attention back to the music and note how many times this mental drifting occurred. At the conclusion of the song we took turns sharing our experiences—namely, our ability (however labored at times) to tune into the structure, rhythms, vocality, and instrumentation of the music.

We began to think about differences between hearing and listening in terms of intention, sensory experience, duration, and effect.

From here, we began reading and discussing selections from books, academic journals, and newspapers. We intentionally assigned a variety of readings, in terms of length, complexity, and theoretical orientation. We moved, for example, from a *New York Times* article about finding “John Cage moments” in everyday life (Kozinn) to Barry Mauer’s theorizations in his *Performance Research* article “Glenn Gould and the New Listener.”<sup>4</sup> We scrutinized, by way of a second listening exercise, the differences between Gould’s 1955 and 1981 recordings of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*. We watched a video of Céleste Boursier-Mougenot’s 2010 installation at the Barbican in London where small birds “play” electric guitars by sitting on them, attempting to nest in the strings, and so on, and then paired this video with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s writing on the brown stagemaker bird and the *ritornello* in, respectively, *What Is Philosophy?* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.<sup>5</sup> Throughout this time, listening denoted a type of sensation guided by our ears, as well as a concerted effort to tune in to the specificity of a given event. Mostly, we did not pause to make this distinction and listening slowly transformed into a more general philosophical attunement toward the everyday. A predetermined syllabus did not guide us from week to week; instead, we responded to the previous class’s questions and observations, often taking a day or two to reflect on the current course of learning before assigning materials for the following session. If the word *syllabus* hails from the ancient Greek term for table of contents—specifically, a label indicating the contents of rolled-up papyrus scrolls—then our list of readings and activities attempted to emulate something like a progressive and fluid index of our collective encounters with listening. As such, we moved away from the often university-mandated practice of handing out a syllabus (which includes a complete listing of course materials and assignments) by the end of the first week of the semester. We did not issue grades to our bootleggers; instead, we responded weekly to their assignments and our discussions with observations and challenges.

We designed most of these challenges to cultivate more attentive auditory awareness in the students and, as importantly, in ourselves. Thus, we decided early on that each of us would be tasked with listening for and locating a “John Cage moment” during that week. We brought these moments with us to the next meeting. Our two sonic encounters, for example, occurred as follows: Will, from within his university office, attended to the monthly hurricane siren that performs the Twin Cities’ weather-disaster readiness. The proximity of the siren to the university campus results in an intense wall of sound that permeates bodies and buildings alike. On that day, Will noticed how the usually painful intensity of the sound transitioned into a pleasurable experience due to the thickening of time and space that accompanied the dropping pitch of the waning wail. Meanwhile, away from campus, a different kind of sound hailed Joanne. Walking across her living room, she stopped mid-stride as the piercing, repetitive tone of a car alarm signaled an infringement of “personal space.” Physically reorientating herself toward the direction of the sound, she found herself receiving it anew: what had earlier been an intrusion into a neighborhood’s daily soundscape transformed into a symphony of alertness comprised of not one, but several subtle pitches. When we reconvened the following week, each discussed these moments, addressing both how these sounds drew our attention (physical, imaginative, emotional) and how we thought differently about them now. Collectively, we began to rethink mundane, even annoying, soundscapes less as experiences we had to tolerate and more as creative, musical relationships or encounters with our surroundings.

Supplementing in-class discussions and out-of-class assignments, everyone began corresponding during the week; we e-mailed one another relevant articles, videos, and quotations, collectively contributing to the momentum of the class by building on insights and questions. Circulating videos of Cage and Gould performances was especially popular among us, as each found online clips of these two singular musicians across several decades. Importantly, each of our bootleg meetings returned to the *how* of listening; this, in turn, led us to consider the complex, and at times contradictory, processes involved in thinking, working, learning, and teaching.



### Para-Pedagogical Insights Fermatas

Of the many realizations made throughout the bootleg experience, two in particular prompted a rethinking of the pedagogical philosophy motivating our work within the academic institution. The first occurred while reading cultural studies theorist John Mowitt's article "The Sound of Music in the Era of Its Electronic Reproducibility." It begins with an analysis of a 1980s Memorex television commercial featuring Chuck Mangione and Ella Fitzgerald in which Fitzgerald is challenged to tell the difference between a live musical event and its technological reproduction. Watching a group of musicians performing one of Mangione's hits on the other side of a glass partition within a soundproof recording studio, Fitzgerald indicates her uncertainty. This uncertainty leads Mangione and his band to reveal that the music was coming from a recording, thus prompting the memorable phrase to appear on the screen: "Is it live or is it Memorex?"

Mowitt's fascination with the commercial becomes clear in his argument. "In short," he writes, "following Fitzgerald's example, we resort to listening with our eyes and reducing the qualitative significance of musical expression to the technical perfection of its reproduction" (176). Having read this article after a foray into Glenn Gould's theory of the "New Listener," which presents the notion that authentic, live musical events will necessarily fail to captivate the new (contemporary) listener who has already begun to prefer the sound of technologically enhanced recordings such as his own *Goldberg Variations*, Mowitt's argument gave way to several questions: Within the context of the culture industry's commodification of existence, what are the stakes of ceding the domain of sound to the domain of the visual? Even if we can determine the many ways in which sounds have been prepared for us, are we sure that we even know how to listen anymore? Or has the dominance of sight within a visually mediated world rendered our ears feeble? Is listening now done for us ahead of time, and are the results of those listening sessions culled and then relayed back to us through visual media, all for the benefit of corporations?

These questions prepared us for Mowitt's turn to Adorno, who writes: "As music is colonized by the commodity form . . . listeners regress to the point where they will not listen to that which is not recognizable without first protecting themselves with an inoculation for the exotic" (qtd. in Mowitt 187). Hazarding complete existential despair, Will proposed to the bootleggers that we make a substitution wherein we swap *learning* for Adorno's word *music* and *students* for his *listeners*, thus yielding the phrase: "As learning is colonized by the commodity form . . . students regress to the point where they will not learn that which is not recognizable without first protecting themselves with an inoculation for the exotic." Hearing this, the bootleggers frowned and reflected before confirming that this scenario reflects a tendency in higher education. Specifically, they commented on feeling that their time in college had presented an opportunity to "do school" instead of learning how to think. Borrowing Mowitt's argument, we would paraphrase this reflection by saying that the qualitative significance of critical thinking in higher education had been reduced to the "technical perfection" of the *appearance* of learning.

Along with these bleak revelations came a clear mandate. To thwart the mechanical reproduction of school-as-usual—namely, that process through which learning is ceded to the appearance of "doing" school—we, as teachers, would have to help students rethink the classroom as a space in which to tune in to the processes of commodification underscoring and preempting all coursework. To revitalize critical thinking in the classroom, we would not need Prezi or some rebranded presentation software to help all the so-called visual learners, but rather a new practice of listening with which we could begin to distinguish between the sound of critical discourse and its mechanical reproduction, between the collective creation of knowledge and the packaged wholesaling of vouchsafed facts. "Is it live or is it Memorex?"

Continuing with this notion of commodification, another realization became significant to us as we forged ahead to discuss Michel Foucault's lecture from 3 March 1982. In circling back to

ancient Greece and Rome and citing the work of Seneca, he distinguishes between two types of individuals attending philosophy school. Let us listen to Foucault:

And he [Seneca] says that if it is true that we can be impregnated by philosophy when we go to a lecture, a bit like getting sunburned if we stay in the sun, nevertheless, he says, it's still true that some of those who frequent the philosophy school derive no benefit from it. This is because, he says, they were not at the philosophy school as *discipuli* (as disciples, pupils). They were there as *inquilini*, that is to say as tenants. They were the tenants of their place at the philosophy lecture, and in the end they stayed without benefitting from it. (337–38)

Stakes were high in the place of learning generated by the *discipuli* as ideas suffused their bodies, shifting their understanding of their everyday lives outside of the lecture space. However, the *inquilini* were content to occupy a temporary position, one in which they comfortably remained fixed to their views, eschewing the labor needed to cultivate what Foucault names as a “certain technique, a correct way of listening” (338).

The mobility characterized by the *discipuli* carried us to another ancient Greek figure, the musician Orpheus, when our bootleggers read an excerpt from Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*: “Everything animate and inanimate followed him [when he played]. He moved the rocks on the hillside and turned the courses of the rivers” (139). This familiar story of the Greek god's abilities acquires new significance when we listen (imaginatively) to the euphonious melodies of the famous ancient Greek musician in tandem with the words of musicologist and classical scholar Jon Solomon, who reminds us that *harmony* did not originally correspond to music: “For [Homer] ‘harmony’—originally from the verb ἀρμόζω, which means ‘to fit, join, or fasten’—is the ‘fitting together’ of the raft on which Odysseus floats away from Calypso” (105). Orpheus's harmonious music mobilized the natural world like Odysseus's raft sent him to sea, and any discussion of Orpheus's music must contain an understanding of journey, travel, and movement. While we may know, then, that it was not Orpheus's ability to produce sound, but his sight that betrayed him when he turned around to see if Eurydice was following him out of Hades, we may place more emphasis on sight than on the disharmonious action of turning, of attempting to move in two directions at once: back into the darkness and out toward the light. In our bootleg class, Orpheus's turn back, his ability to turn the world around him, and the devastation that befell him when he turned to look at Eurydice prompted us to begin thinking of listening and our approach to learning in new terms. In what direction do we send our attention when we listen with our eyes? In what ways do distractions end up pulling us in opposite directions? What is the difference between a harmonious and a dissonant “turning towards”?

Once we started to attend to our own language in characterizing the act of listening, we moved away from the notions of “spending” time and “paying” attention and toward the concept/practice of “turning our attention towards.” While this may appear at first a mere semantic difference, we believe that the differentiation is actually quite important. For instance, deciding to refrain from using “paying” in the university classroom put into practice, however subtle, our opposition to the notion that students are (now) tenants, customers, clients, or consumers of the university, that they pay their tuition with the expectation that they will receive instruction that assures them of their comfortable status in our increasingly service-oriented economy and that they, in paying our salaries, deserve a favorable grade and degree handed to them. Our iteration of the phrase *turning towards* also strove to emulate and embody Cage's statement about his famous composition 4'33": “No day goes by without my making use of that piece in my life and in my work. . . . I listen to it every day. I don't sit down to do it; I turn my attention toward it. . . . I realize that it's going on continuously” (qtd. in Kozinn n.p.).

In turning our attention *towards*, we become subject to that which calls us (a lecture, Gould's playing, a car alarm, a hurricane siren), give over our agency as rational humans to the irrational objects, nonhuman bodies, and environments around us, and yet also refine our subjectivity as active



shapers of our own learning and of the world in which we live. As such, our bootleg class ended by beginning to cultivate a practice of what we called “turning towards turning towards.” This practice relies upon our continued insistence to stay alert to signals (however muted) that invite us to rethink, re-listen, and relearn that which we think we know and to resist those potentially tempting inoculations. The ambivalence of the “maybe” that bridges learning and failure returns here, since the act of *turning towards turning towards* takes considerable time and effort, which, in our contemporary moment (in and out of university settings) requires us all to allow for the possibility that more pressing matters will steal our attention back. Bootleg promises an ethical rejuvenation that can reshape our relation to ourselves and to our surrounding world.

### **Bootleg: A Coda**

And so, after several weeks of class meetings, we came to our final bootleg session. We proposed that our work continue in a different form as we, all of us, set about practicing this *turning towards turning towards* in our individual lives, and that should any individual need to call the group together again, she need only flash the bat signal. That is what we called it. We had immediately, unwittingly fallen back on sight as the dominant signal of gathering and sharing ideas and observations of learning; we had failed to take up our own invitation to think sonically. (We still return to that moment, wondering what an appropriate audible counterpoint would be for the outline of a creature projected onto a night sky.) Following bootleg, months passed with no signal until November 2013 when I (Will) came upon an article by philosopher Simon Critchley in “The Stone,” the *New York Time’s* opinion section dedicated to philosophy. Here, Critchley discussed poetry and listening in the Platonic dialogue *Phaedrus*. Another return to ancient Greece. I wrote to our bootleggers and asked them to renew their attentive listening practice by entering into a philosophical conversation with a friend or stranger. They would then translate that experience into a poem and post it on Facebook for the rest of the group to read. Two members of the group completed the task, and then the group faded away again, perhaps awaiting a future signal, an audible one this time.

Several months later, we began composing parts of what would become this essay for a Mid-America Theatre Conference presentation in March 2014. Our coauthored talk took place on a panel dedicated to “Radical Pedagogy.” We asked our listeners to help us reflect on our bootleg experience and the awareness it brought to our university teaching. Following the talk, we received a helpful query about our experiment’s relationship with another connotation of bootleg: a cheap copy of a live performance, usually a concert. That the question was posed by one of Will’s current graduate students seemed appropriate. We were forced to confront not only the terms of our talk, but of the pedagogical philosophy at work in and through our bootleg class. Was it ultimately nothing more than a cheap copy of a university classroom, with two PhD-wielding facilitators at the helm? Did the group’s exclusivity (after all, it was convened by invitation only) reinvent the stereotypical ivory-tower learning environment crafted for the few and not the many? Given that we had little time to prepare weekly questions and assignments because of other teaching duties (for which Will was getting paid), were we compromising the quality of the learning experience? This line of inquiry leads to deserved criticism. Our bootleg class may have had the appearance of a radical learning experience, free from the trappings of the corporate university, but, beneath the appearance, we had relied upon traditional teaching tactics. However, the flexible and improvisatory means by which we determined the readings, the complete disregard for formal assessment, the absence of any certificate of completion, and the fact that this experience was enabled by time happily offered leads away from the fear that we had created a cheap knock-off. Most importantly, this experience was conjured into being through the desires of a student to think deeply about something; in doing so, he subverted the top-down institutional structure that places students in the position of consumers rather than producers.

While we wait for our bootleg group to reconvene in some form, we turn our attention toward the institutional classrooms in which we teach and try to infuse those spaces with the insights gained through bootleg. Chief among these insights are the need to continually reconfigure the classroom environment, the benefit of cultivating a close listening practice within and beyond institutional walls, and an insistence that all students choose the path of *discipuli* by eschewing the well-worn path of school-as-usual. Although the impetus of the bootleg experience may have derived from a perceived failure in the formal educational system, the class on listening, in fact, opened a threshold through which it was possible to hear a new way of conversing with students, which, in turn, now helps us approach the classroom as the moment in which we close the gap between who we are and who we might be.<sup>6</sup>

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*Joanne Zerdy* is an independent researcher who focuses on contemporary Scottish theatre and performance, and on cultural and environmental policy-making in Scotland. She is also intrigued by the texts, gardens, and installations of Ian Hamilton Finlay, and by the unfolding of gardens in general. With Marlis Schweitzer, she has coedited *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things* (2014), and her essays have appeared in *TDR, Theatre Research International*, and *Contemporary Theatre Review*. With Will Daddario, she has coauthored an essay about food, politics, and the theatre of Ruzzante in sixteenth-century Padua for *Food and Theatre on the World Stage* (2015).

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## Notes

1. For more on the Situationists and *détournement*, see <<http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/315>>.
2. We drew much inspiration at the time from the Beneath the University conference, held in Minneapolis in April 2010, which fashioned dialogues among undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, independent scholars, and community members to address, query, and rethink the role of the university today. See <[http://beneaththeu.org/Beneath\\_the\\_University/home.html](http://beneaththeu.org/Beneath_the_University/home.html)>.
3. In Martinez's words: "[The interested students] asked if we might have a meeting and talk about my potentially teaching them some form of that class [on autotheatre]. I think that first meeting, which I guess is when bootleg actually began, was pretty amazing. We talked about why they wanted to learn this practice, how it spoke [to] the gaps/skills within their current training. We talked about what it meant to include theoretical reading as a part of theatre-making practice. We talked about why they were all boys, and why they were reaching out to me—the gender politics at play. We also discussed ways to modify the syllabus. Such a better process for the first day of class than I had ever experienced. We then met around twice a month for the fall/spring semesters that year. We read and built pieces and invited others to experience them. Over the year, I asked for lots of feedback in terms of how to scaffold skills and modify the syllabus. What readings/exercises worked. What they needed more/less of. That year gave me an opportunity to try out methods that our own department simply

did not have the space/the mind/the opportunity to entertain.” And: “In terms of auto-theatre, here’s a link to Ant Hampton’s page, who coined the term if not exactly the form: <<http://www.rotozaza.co.uk/autoteatro.html>>.” (Carra Martinez, “Re: bootleg question,” personal communication [e-mail] with author [Zerdy], 28 January 2014.)

4. For more on the intersections of performance and listening, see *Performance Research’s* 2010 special issue “On Listening” (vol. 15, no. 3).

5. On the brown stagemaker bird, see Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (1994, 184); on the *ritornello*, see their *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, 312).

6. We want to acknowledge the efforts of all of our own teachers who have helped, and continue to help, us contemplate this relationship.

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