



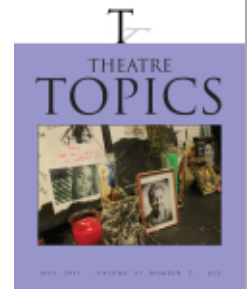
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Student-driven, Immersive, Interactive, and Technology-based
Devising

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Encountering *Generation (Wh)Y*: Building Bridges through Student-driven, Immersive, Interactive, and Technology-based Devising

Asif Majid and Rob Jansen

Introduction

In fall 2014 the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics at Georgetown University (an interdisciplinary endeavor at the intersection of the School of Foreign Service and the Department of Theater and Performance Studies; hereafter “the Lab”) launched Myriad Voices: A Cross-Cultural Performance Festival, a two-year collection of performances, convenings, public forums, interdisciplinary courses, and new theatrical work. The Lab was one of six universities and arts organizations nationwide to receive funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation as part of its Building Bridges program, which seeks to expand awareness and understanding about Muslim societies through the performing arts. Co-founding director of the Lab Derek Goldman saw Myriad Voices as an opportunity “to think expansively about ways of engaging performance” in an effort to “convey the diversity of Muslim majority populations” and “expose and call into question prevalent stereotypes,” while engaging students “in a truly dialogic performative process.” The third Myriad Voices event, *Generation (Wh)Y: Global Voices On Stage*, was an innovative multimedia performance devised by Georgetown students resulting from their year-long, interview-based dialogues with young people from nineteen countries, designed to create community and expand cultural understanding through one-on-one interactions. Here, we discuss the production’s efforts at authentically connecting interviewees and student deviser-performers, deviser-performers and audience members, audience members themselves, and (ultimately) notions of self and Other. We argue that achieving a truly dialogic process requires participants and audiences to build bridges despite various spatial, social, and emotional barriers, a goal we sought to accomplish through immersive, interactive, and technology-driven storytelling.

Specifically, the Duke Foundation’s grant tasked awardees with creating “cross-cultural knowledge and understanding by engaging young people and other audiences in performances [focused on] contemporary Muslim-majority regions of the world.” The grant targeted millennials (defined by the foundation as those born after 1980), a generation growing up in the aftermath of 9/11 and bombarded with images of Muslims as terrorists in social media, television, and film (see Ryzik). As such, *Generation (Wh)Y*, a free event held in Georgetown’s Davis Performing Arts Center (DPAC) in April 2015 sought to provide an alternate narrative and fulfill the foundation’s goal of building bridges between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Furthermore, it allowed the Lab to highlight the international nature of Washington, D.C., and Georgetown’s student body, as reflected in admissions rates: the undergraduate class of 2018 was admitted in 2014 with 8 percent of international students (Moore); it was 11 percent for the class of 2017, and 8 percent for the class of 2016 (Ashley). Outreach for *Generation (Wh)Y* focused on the university campus and previous attendees of Myriad Voices events (which included the Arab community for *Syria: The Trojan Women* and the South Asian community for *Amrika Chalo*). One international student, on seeing *Generation (Wh)Y*,

recognized the “think global, act local” intent of the production and its focus on millennial voices, remarking that it was “between us [students], you know, from us and to us.”

Indeed, the title of the show itself played with stereotypes: those of the millennial generation, Gen Y, being both wary of commitment (always asking “why”) and distracted by technology. By contrast, we believed that if students felt ownership over the project and experienced a genuine connection to its content, they would be fully engaged. Moreover, we believed that we could use students’ proficiency with technology to expand theatrical possibilities; in particular, we wanted to explore how technology could draw student devisers and audiences closer to their international peers by bringing those peers into the performance space.

As a project, *Generation (Wh)Y* rested on the notion of the “encounter,” which we defined based on a poem, “Peas and Carrots” by Egyptian political cartoonist Mohamed “Andeel” Qandeel, that explores the origin of humankind from the perspective of gods on high who split humanity into nations and tribes. Core Ensemble member Michelle Chen brought “Peas and Carrots” into the devising process and translated it from Arabic to English along with fellow Core member Hussah al-Babtain, after which it became an essential part of the Encounter titled “Discovery.” The poem’s concluding stanza calls for moments of unity in which: “a single mind might house two minds / and in a single chest beat two hearts / and in a single body merge two beings” (Qandeel 39). Following Qandeel, we saw encountering as an intimate bridging of self and Other beyond the confines of traditional Western (proscenium-style) theatre, requiring deep conversation and audience immersion; the encounter was thus key to each of the aforementioned authentic connections. From this foundation our process was as follows: first, student deviser-performers created relationships with interviewees through multiple Skype conversations and interviews, ultimately presenting to audiences intimate verbatim narratives that interviewees allowed to be shared. Then we designed the production to be an immersive experience in which the fourteen student deviser-performers (hereafter “the Core Ensemble”) interacted with the audience during the Opening; the three aforementioned Encounters, each of which focusing on a particular theme (Discovery, Laughter, and Risk) that students had used to guide their discussions and conversations with interviewees; and the Closing in which audience members encountered one another and the Encounters’ themes within their own lives. Finally and as a result, *Generation (Wh)Y*’s approach to encountering underscored the vulnerability required in order to unify self and Other.

Generation (Wh)Y’s performance structure included an Opening in DPAC’s main Gonda Theatre, three thematic Encounters held in different spaces around DPAC, and a Closing back in the Gonda. The Opening involved the Core Ensemble. Each Encounter was variable in the size of its cast (between two and six Core members), but occurred simultaneously within ten-minute blocks to ensure that audiences rotated at the same time. Before entering the proscenium-style Gonda, audience members received different-colored passports (blue, red, or green) as programs in the lobby, and guides (visiting students from LaGuardia Community College¹) used these colors to create mini-communities by seating audience passport groups together in the Gonda (fig. 1). The passport colors served as organizing tools, as passport groups experienced the Encounters in different orders, meaning that each Encounter was performed three times in a given evening (once per passport group). The Closing returned all passport groups (and the Core Ensemble) to the Gonda to reflect on the Encounters with fellow audience members.

The Devising Process

Since *Generation (Wh)Y* sought to build bridges, our process was intentionally inclusive. There were no auditions; rather, students were recruited through flyers posted around campus, presentations in front of classrooms across different majors (for example, STEM, arts, politics) and student organizations with varying national foci (for example, Korean, Arab, Indian), mass emails to on-campus



FIG. 1. Program book for *Generation (Wh)Y*. (Photo: ZongXian Ang, via the US–Middle East Youth Network.)

listservs (for example, the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, the Conflict Resolution program), and individual connections that the Lab had with Georgetown students of diverse backgrounds. Recruitment was intensive and spanned a nine-month period, taking place before and throughout the devising process. As a result we integrated theatre and non-theatre students, bringing together those from different majors (for example, theatre, politics, literature, foreign languages), as well as undergraduate and graduate students.

Among them, the Core Ensemble students spoke a number of languages: Arabic, Armenian, English, French, Hindi, Mandarin, Spanish, and Urdu. They came from a variety of ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds, including Arab, black, Chinese, Indian, mixed race, and white. Twelve of the fourteen had personal transnational connections prior to the project (including two who were international students), whether through friends or family. In some early devising sessions students used knowledge of their own languages and cultures to bring in poems from around the world and animated them using movement, projections, and space. Every aspect of the project—from logistics regarding the number of rehearsals to the time required for students to gather interviews and testimonies—reflected this uniqueness.

Additionally, *Generation (Wh)Y* was the first time that any of the Core members (except one) had worked through a devised process. As an introduction, we offered examples of projects that have tackled major social issues through interview-based theatre, such as Ping Chong's *Undesirable Elements* series, *We Will Rise: Selections from The Afghan Women's Writing Project* by playwrights Elizabeth Martin and Lauren Hynek, and various works by theatre artist Anna Deavere Smith, among others. We also focused our early efforts on building basic theatrical skills (ensemble, movement, tableau, text, and voice) necessary for devised work. Through these exercises we developed a common vocabulary and sense of ensemble so that students were comfortable devising together, which was especially important given our participants' multiple backgrounds. For example, one student with no previous theatre experience who was initially reticent to be involved in the artistic aspects of

the project ended up directing other students in one of the Encounters to fulfill *her* creative vision, based on our early skill-building efforts.

About half of the Core Ensemble members also took a fall 2014 course team taught by the Lab's co-founding directors Goldman and Cynthia Schneider titled "Culture and Diplomacy," which offered students opportunities to practice movement, image, text, and projection skills. Students in the course (open to Core members and others) created short pieces based on interview testimony, conducting and transcribing interviews before transforming them into theatrical text. Students who emerged from the course and became part of the Core Ensemble strengthened the experience for others, since the Encounters were created by subgroups of Core members, each of which contained at least one student who took the course.

Our devising process was also open to allow for students to participate as they could. Some of them contributed during the generative process, but could not stay for the performances, as other commitments arose. Those who stayed did so out of a strong connection to the process and desire to see the work performed for audiences. Initially, six students from the Culture and Diplomacy course—three of whom later joined the Core Ensemble—settled on the themes of Discovery, Laughter, and Risk that drove the final Encounters, thus setting the stage for the overall piece by developing cornerstone inquiries. Their thought process was captured on a dry-erase board, resulting in a number of questions that the students wanted to ask interviewees. After multiple refinements that shaped initial impulses into open-ended, focused, and probing questions, the students settled on three inquiries: tell me about a recent moment of self-discovery that changed you in some way (Discovery); describe when laughter has helped you through a difficult time or experience (Laughter); and describe a risk or journey you took that made you who you are (Risk).

Cornerstone inquiries in hand, Core Ensemble members encountered youth from around the world based on the Lab's preexisting relationships with international artists and a diverse range of cultural organizations, and preexisting relationships that Georgetown's Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs had with international partners, such as Lahore University of Management Sciences and Forman Christian College; students also used their own personal connections as they saw fit. Responses to the aforementioned inquiries reflected three circles of participants: the Core Ensemble, Narratives Ensemble, and Voices Ensemble. The Core Ensemble (the innermost circle) consisted of the fourteen students who shape, devise, and perform the piece; the Narratives Ensemble (the intermediary circle) was made up of fifteen to twenty individuals from around the world who were interviewed by the Core Ensemble multiple times and the nine theatre students from LaGuardia Community College who served as guides; and the Voices Ensemble (the outermost circle) included those in the *Generation (Wh)Y* Facebook group who contributed video responses explaining what comes to mind when they think of home (these appeared in the Opening) and audience members who responded to the cornerstone inquiries during the Closing. Moving from the inner to the outermost circles over time gave Core members great responsibility, as they were at the core (re)presenting the periphery.

The Lab's commitment to an inclusive process was further reflected in *Generation (Wh)Y*'s artistic choice to use multiple performance modes, expanding the types of students who could be involved. The project leveraged various approaches, including aerial silks, dance, music, poetry, projection, and testimony. Students embraced this spirit across the entire production. In Discovery, dancers developed original choreography while incorporating music, poetry in multiple languages, and their own projected shadows; in Laughter, audiences were welcomed with café music and continually interacted with performers when choosing from a menu of laughter; in Risk, poetry and images were projected onto fabric and performers climbed aerial silks. Multiple disciplines created an immersive theatrical world unique to each Encounter.

Such inclusivity was integrated into the devising process as well, particularly in terms of technology. Students gathered testimonies through interviews, many of which occurred via Skype or telephone in languages other than English, made possible by the diversity of languages that our students spoke; Core members conducted interviews in either English or the language of the person they were interviewing. Additionally, multimedia designer Jared Mezzocchi led workshops on how projection can be used in storytelling, which each Encounter leveraged in different ways (fig. 2). Some early rehearsals took place via Skype and involved LaGuardia students, during which Georgetown and LaGuardia students tested interview questions on one another. And as mentioned above, video testimonies from the *Generation (Wh)Y* Facebook group were woven together for the Opening. While technology is often decried as a dividing force (as in the run-up to the 2016 US presidential election; see Wong et al.), our experience with *Generation (Wh)Y* was one in which technology and social media connected the aforementioned Ensembles, creating a multidisciplinary artistic process and product that wove together various types of stories and narratives.

Despite its successes at creating unity, our devising process revealed multiple challenges, the first of which revolved around student ownership versus facilitator guidance of the project. Our students wanted a framework for the performance that they could fill in with specific content, which we were reticent to create. As facilitators, we wanted the devised content to dictate the form rather than the other way around. Thus our challenge was walking what Goldman describes as “a tightrope” between top-down “clarity of structure” and bottom-up student ownership and “shaping [of] the event.” Ultimately, we yielded and created a structure (Opening, three Encounters, and Closing) that the Core Ensemble filled in, reminding us of the constant negotiation and input needed to keep students at the heart of the project. This facilitated the rest of the process, as it decentralized devising such that each Core Ensemble subgroup felt comfortable using personal connections, conducted its own interviews, crafted separate scripts, recruited collaborators, and began staging its Encounter. This allowed more creativity alongside the project’s stated objectives of artistic and participant inclusivity, while giving Core members increased ownership over the project’s content. Throughout our devising, Core members came together to share work with and offer feedback to one another before returning to their Encounter subgroups and continuing to devise.

Another tension involved issues of representation. The Lab’s goal for *Generation (Wh)Y* as a student-driven process based on “real experiences from global voices and the poetry of everyday life” was broader than the goals of the Duke Foundation’s Building Bridges program, which sought to “advance relationships, increase understanding and reduce bias between Muslim and non-Muslim communities.” The varying foci (diverse “global voices” for the Lab, and “Muslim” voices for the foundation) proved to be a delicate balance for both the Core Ensemble and us as facilitators. The students were committed to *Generation (Wh)Y* highlighting “global voices,” but it was our task as facilitators to ensure that Muslim voices were emphasized within a global context. In devising sessions some students voiced concerns about the focus on Muslim voices and how best to weave in those that did not come from Muslims. To be sure, Core members were not dismissing the importance of highlighting Muslim voices, but a strain was apparent: one Indian American student expressed frustration after she chose not to include an Irish interviewee’s narrative, because the interviewee was not Muslim, despite the narrative resonating with her Encounter’s theme. Although she felt that her artistic license was limited, she was more committed to the project’s goals. Indeed, the subtitle of *Generation (Wh)Y*, “*Global Voices On Stage*” (decided by the Lab before students were recruited), gave a more international dimension to the project though within limits: global voices were important, but Muslim global voices even more so. As facilitators we gave students the project guidelines within which to work, but they ultimately made curatorial decisions regarding content inclusion or exclusion.

A related challenge was ensuring that the project maintained sensitive interviewing practices. *Generation (Wh)Y* walked the line between research with human subjects and creative documentary theatre. As with all such testimony-based theatre, there was a responsibility to open up conversations that resulted in rich and revelatory personal narratives, while also protecting the sensitive experi-



FIG. 2. Discovery's use of projection as storytelling, displaying Nada's testimony, in *Generation (Wh)Y*. (Photo: C. Stanley Photography.)

ences of interviewees. We handled this challenge by developing a statement that students used when interviewing, inspired by informed-consent statements from universities around the country. Our project was not unique in this regard, as other devised projects have experienced similar challenges in terms of the ethics of representation. In particular, *Generation (Wh)Y* risked, in the words of performance studies scholar Nitasha Sharma, turning “people of color and dominated groups” into “a backdrop with no voice and no context, no humanity” (qtd. in Peralta). The Core Ensemble and audience members, as well as interviewees, recognized and discussed this challenge. As one member put it: “We’ll never convey 100 percent accuracy; it’s theatre at the end . . . as long as you’re going through that struggle [of representation], that’s good.”

To be sure, Core members saw themselves and acted as cultural representatives. Students felt strong connections to the individuals that they encountered from around the world, as these relationships developed over hours of one-on-one dialogue. After conducting practice interviews among themselves, we encouraged Core members to build relationships with their international interviewees rather than seek a certain response or answer. The interviews that created the deepest connections were those in which mutual trust was established, which often meant returning to interview the same person multiple times. It was only through these relationships built between Core members and interviewees that the former could determine which stories most respected their interviewees, based on an intimate understanding of who their interviewees were and interviewees’ confirmation of what stories they wanted to be shared.

Performance Narrative

This performance narrative follows the order of Encounters as experienced by blue passport-holders: Risk, Laughter, and Discovery.

Opening: Home

One by one, members of the Core Ensemble stood up from among the audience and said the word “home” in various languages—Arabic, French, Hindi, Mandarin, Spanish, and Urdu among them—expanding to include synonyms for home as ensemble members moved from their seats to the stage. The Core members presented preset tableau images for some definitions of home, such as tranquility and a place of discomfort. Then, the Ensemble broke from the stage and introduced themselves to the show’s attendees. They began short conversations, asking questions like “What do you think of when you think of home?” and “Where or what is home for you?” in an effort to connect directly with audience members and their sense of home (fig. 3).

A short film began to play, which was a collection of Facebook videos from young people around the world responding to the question, “What do you think of when you think of home?” We used technology here as a unifier, bringing in the actual (rather than embodied) voices of those who contributed so that audience members merged their sense of home with that of others. Once the video concluded the LaGuardia guides began taking audience members through the Encounters. Each guide wore a T-shirt that matched the color of an audience member’s passport. When transitioning, audience members saw one another while moving from place to place, but had distinct paths throughout the building.

Encounter: Risk

Audiences entered the Devine, an intimate black-box theatre housing five benches originally created for the Lab’s production of *Syria: The Trojan Women*—a production that never occurred at Georgetown because the performers were denied visas. Using the benches in Risk paid tribute to these women, who took tremendous risks in leaving Syria as refugees, an intention that was announced to the audience at the start. One Core member sat at each of the five benches, and a sixth waited outside the Devine. A pair of dark-blue aerial silks was suspended from the ceiling, and two other pieces of fabric hung in the room’s corners. The Devine was lit with a wash of blues, greens, and purples, and audience members heard sounds of winds and storms as they sat alongside Core members on the benches. Poems from the devising process were projected throughout the space.

To situate Risk within the context of current events, an ensemble member opened the Encounter by embodying Reem, a member of the *Syria* cast who agreed that her testimony be shared, and recounted Reem’s harrowing journey from Syria to Jordan as a result of the Syrian war. Then the actor depicting Reem retreated to become a guardian figure watching from the sidelines and intersecting with the Encounter at key moments. The Core members introduced themselves by using the name and personal details of the testimony that they were sharing—for example, “Hina, [age] 28, Lahore, Pakistan. Teacher. Actor, theatre for social change”—such that they became “spokespeople for our generation” speaking “on behalf of our comrades” (“Risk”). Each spokesperson then articulated a definition of “risk”—Batta defined it as “danger”; Khava as something to avoid; and Hina as not mattering so long as you take risks “for the right reasons”—as Omar took an actual risk by climbing the central aerial silk. In Risk’s script, students used the term “spokesperson” to describe the intimacy of deviser-performers and interviewees as members of the same performance community. Core members embodied the stories from interviewees that they had come to know and made casting decisions themselves. At this point in the evening across all Encounters, audiences saw the performer as the narrative that they embodied. It was only in the Closing that Core members introduced themselves by their actual forename rather than that of the person whose testimony they shared.

Spokespeople began relating experiences that involved risk, such as parents starting businesses and choosing to wear or not *hijab*. In particular, a story about protesting during the Egyptian revolution created a poignant image with which Reem intersected. One spokesperson, Mohamed, told of



FIG. 3. The Opening of *Generation (Wh)Y*. (Photo: C. Stanley Photography.)

protesting in Cairo's Tahrir Square and seeing that "two meters to your right, someone would get shot." At the word *shot*, Reem opened the central silk to shield the others from harm (fig. 4). This action invoked the ongoing (during the production and as of this writing) Syrian war and refugee crisis, which compel risk-taking by ordinary Syrians. Reem's protection of her fellow risk-takers inverted the current political dynamics by which many Syrians are unprotected.

Core members intended for the central theme of Risk to contextualize and humanize experiences like the Egyptian revolution and the Syrian refugee crisis, which can often seem remote and difficult to understand. As such, the Encounter concluded with a video montage from the underground film collective Abounaddara that documented everyday life in Syria amid war. Then each spokesperson returned to their original bench (as Reem nestled herself within the central silk) as audience members had a moment to consider their own relationships to risk.

Encounter: Laughter

Audiences transitioned to a curtained-off section of DPAC's lobby for "A Taste of Laughter." The area was set up as a café, featuring eight cocktail tables around which audience members stood. Moving from table to table, three Core members dressed as servers improvised and welcomed the audience, inviting them to consider a menu of laughter displayed on a flat-screen television as French café music and recorded laughter wafted through the speakers.

Laughter explored how language and society shape what makes someone laugh and also the deeper meanings that comedy reflects, particularly in terms of how it helps individuals endure difficult situations. The Encounter "filled up" the audience with cross-cultural comedy, similar to being indulged with global cuisines. Audience members were introduced to a palate of laughter through film critic James Agee's "ladder of laughs," a typology developed in reference to levels of laughter elicited by silent-film comedians like Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. Servers then highlighted



FIG. 4. Risk in *Generation (Wh)Y*. (Photo: C. Stanley Photography.)

words for laughter from around the world and brought in expert testimony, including writings from philosopher Henri Bergson and psychologist Robert Provine, illustrating various relationships to comedy and following our devising approach of integrating performance and literature.

Servers selected random audience members to indicate which “hors d’oeuvre,” from an international “sampling of finely crafted quotes,” they wished to hear. With whimsical titles like “A Strange Perspective,” “Something Old,” and “Something Slightly Younger,” the hors d’oeuvres included short statements on comedy from the philosopher Plato, *The Holy Quran*, and the legendary emperor Fu Xi’s *I Ching*. Next, jokes from around the world (“appetizers”) were presented in their language of origin—Arabic, French, or German—and then translated into English. One of these, dubbed “The Greatest Joke Ever,” was told in French: “There are two eggs in a fridge. One says to the other: ‘Hey, you’re quite hairy for an egg.’ The other replies: ‘But I am a kiwi.’” Many of these jokes depended on wordplay or other culturally specific deliveries, reminding audiences that understanding is often context-specific.

For the “main course,” collected testimonies echoed the evening’s emphasis on personal narratives. When interviewing, students found a cross-cultural commonality: that individual anecdotes were what made people laugh the most, often in situations of personal or social turmoil. Thus they presented multiple selections (mobile-phone theft in Karachi, a dinner date in Alexandria, and the social rules for drinking tea in Cairo) from which audience members chose, each highlighting a near-universal need to find laughter in difficult situations. The Cairo story ended with this observation: “I guess, if it wasn’t for all the comedy . . . and jokes and everything that happened during the revolution. . . . How can I say this? We’ve seen so many strange things. And even though there was a lot of confusion at times and a lot of sorrow, a lot of all of this was extremely funny.”

Laughter concluded with “dessert,” involving audience participation to create a live ladder of laughs, invoking its infectiousness as audience members laughed table by table in increasing intensity. As performers and audience members laughed together, attendees experienced how the

vulnerability, incongruity, and unexpectedness of the Encounter revealed what Provine has called “a volatile mix of gay and macabre that speaks directly to the emotional centers of our brain” on the way to “bond[ing] [and] bring[ing] people together” (1).

Encounter: Discovery

Discovery took place on the Gonda's stage. Two groups of chairs set in checkerboard fashion flanked an open center stage. Guides showed audiences to their seats, as the sound of a *ney* (an Arabian flute, played like a recorder) came from a student musician. To open the Encounter two dancers spun away from a projector, revealing the word “discovery” in white against the black back wall. The Encounter alternated between Qandeel's “Peas and Carrots” poem and young people's testimonies. In performance two Core members sat on the catwalk, reading the poem in English and Arabic. Discovery reflected the interplay among technology, testimony, and body, with testimonies presented as prerecorded silhouettes of Core members reading narratives from individuals of Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Palestinian, and Venezuelan origin. One testimony witnessed a 23-year-old Palestinian woman named Nada discovering a new facet of her identity: “So, for me at the time, identity was very static. It didn't mean anything to me that I was Palestinian . . . but then, when I . . . started learning about the history and politics of the region . . . I realized what it meant to have an identity . . . what it means to call yourself a Palestinian . . . suddenly, identity wasn't as static, it was a dynamic thing.”

All testimonies were projected (alongside name, place of origin, and age) and flipped between being black on white or white on black, while the two dancers interacted with the meaning of the words. For example, the dancers manipulated their bodies to convey underlying messages, such as “what it means to call yourself a Palestinian” (a fist raised slowly into the air) from Nada, and kids being “rowdy” (pushing playfully against the screen on which testimonies were projected) from a Pakistani woman named Neena, who worked with children in the United States and Pakistan and discovered that both are mischievous.

Both dancers interacted with the projected field of white and the poem, linking narrative, technology, and literature through body. When the poem described the strength of the gods and their concern at man's growing power, one dancer used his foot to create a large shadow stepping on and crushing the small shadow of the other dancer. This moment interwove projection and live performance to tell a story, building on our use of projection in the devising process. *Generation (Wh)Y* encouraged and developed such moments of unity among technology, testimony, and body, echoed by the “merg[ing] [of] beings” that the poem's final line describes.

Closing: Invitation

After audience members returned to the Gonda, the Closing facilitated encounters among passport-holders. An emcee directed attendees to find someone with a different-colored passport and have a conversation along the lines of one of the Encounter's themes, with the above-mentioned cornerstone inquiries projected on the upstage wall. The emcee then gathered everyone's attention again and facilitated the introduction of the Georgetown and LaGuardia students, who had scattered about the Gonda in performer/guide pairs. Each student introduced their partner, their partner's birthplace, and what home meant to that partner. Those that spoke a language in addition to English first introduced their partner in that language, be it Arabic, Armenian, Bengali, French, Hindi, Mandarin, or Spanish, and then translated.

Then the emcee directed everyone's attention to the upstage wall, which showed the names of those who had contributed testimonies (or were otherwise involved), with locations and available

pictures. Performer/guide pairs acknowledged the audience, before the emcee invited everyone to continue exploring Discovery, Home, Laughter, and Risk both in the lobby and throughout their lives (fig. 5).

Conclusion

As the performance narrative makes clear, *Generation (Wh)Y* created space for some non-Muslim points of view in its final product. Quotes from Plato and the *I Ching*, as well as testimony from a young woman of Venezuelan origin, expanded the performance beyond the Muslim-focused goals of the Duke Foundation. Although the majority of narrative and poetic moments came from individuals from Muslim societies, only two interviewee narratives (one in Discovery about Muslims being called terrorists, and the other in Risk about converting to Islam and deciding whether or not to wear hijab) explicitly referenced Islam or Muslims—the remainder did not feature religion at all. This problematized the notion of a “Muslim society” while simultaneously resulting from how relationships were built between Georgetown students and their international counterparts, who related to one another more in terms of age and theme of Encounter than shared faith. Our decision to go beyond the Duke Foundation’s mandate allowed the Core Ensemble to connect with their interviewees on a level that transcended the religious and moved toward the global and universal, all the while recognizing a facet of the societies from which their interviewees came—a crucial step if we are to recognize self and Other as the “two beings” in the “single body” that Qandeel illustrates.

Despite some initial concern that we had strayed from the grant’s parameters, at the final gathering of all Duke Foundation grantees in June 2015, the foundation’s staff praised *Generation (Wh)Y* as an exemplar of the types of projects that it hoped to support through its Building Bridges program. For the Lab, *Generation (Wh)Y*’s success came in “the relationships built across geographic, cultural, disciplinary differences on a project that the participants were, at every stage, central in defining” (Goldman). Indeed, it was the delicate balancing of multiple voices and perspectives inherent in our devised process that led us to fulfill the Duke Foundation’s goals and stay true to the Lab’s vision. This “encounter” between the two appeared in the decisions made throughout the creative process, such as what narratives to include or exclude, as well as the project’s varied framings, thus highlighting global voices for the Georgetown community and Muslim voices for grant purposes.

In terms of expanding theatrical possibilities, *Generation (Wh)Y* connected youths from nearly twenty countries, both to one another through the Facebook group and with Georgetown students during multiple interviews, a process initiated by email and continued through Skype. Projection enabled a virtual presence of those individuals whose stories were used, linking the Narratives and Voices Ensembles together. Moreover, audience immersion furthered the project’s ongoing conversations around culture and identity, making the “interaction” between artwork and spectator, which performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan has argued is essential for performance, part of the performance itself (147). Just as technology extended the performance space, so did our commitment to interactivity, such that the stories shared among audience members during the Closing co-created the performance and continued outside the theatre. It was important to us that audiences not leave with a sense of closure, but rather with the understanding that, as Pakistani interviewee Jameel indicated in Discovery: “Everywhere are stories. Everyone are [*sic*] stories. You are a story. I am a story. We have many connections with them and every moment we are creating a story, and we are a story.”

By developing and engaging in cross-cultural dialogues, the Core Ensemble ensured that *Generation (Wh)Y* reflected calls to produce work in “a climate of sensitivity, dialogue, respect, and willingness for reciprocity” (Preston 65), as deviser-performers seemed to be telling friends’ rather than interviewees’ stories during the performance. Indeed, in a conversation between a Core member and a student audience member after the show, the former defended the content of Nada’s narrative about “what it means to call yourself Palestinian,” after the student attendee labeled Nada’s declaration



FIG. 5. The Closing of *Generation (Wh)Y*. (Photo: C. Stanley Photography.)

fictitious, arguing that national identity is just a construct. “That’s how she feels,” the Core member said. “You can disagree with it.” In that moment the Core member sided with a young woman she had never met in person, over and above the opinion of a fellow (and physically present) Georgetown student. This advocacy exemplifies the type of camaraderie and relationship-building that the project sought to achieve beyond theatre in which the “encounter” took center stage by bridging self and Other and working toward an intimate, common understanding. Arguably, this example suggests that not all audiences connected to the narratives in the same way that Core members did; yet, the fact that dissenting opinions were respectfully expressed underscores the value of post-performance discussions. The extent to which the production succeeded in connecting interviewees, students, and audience members beyond the production is harder to determine and worthy of further investigation. A future process could do more to foster such post-performance connections.

We would be remiss to re-invoke “encounter” without recalling the current political moment, which cries out for more of the type of work that *Generation (Wh)Y* undertook. Indeed, final edits for this essay were completed days after a US executive order “indefinitely barred Syrian refugees” from entering the country, “suspended all refugee admissions for 120 days,” and “blocked [admission of] citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries” for ninety days (Stack). As this essay goes to press, the constitutionality of a revised version of this executive order is being considered by the Supreme Court. Wrestling with a generally global outlook compared to a more specific exploration of “Muslim societies” through the performing arts while simultaneously seeking to develop an inclusive, student-centered, multidisciplinary, and technology-driven performance pushed us to know ourselves in the process of knowing others. That is, the values that our students held dear about how to construct a more equitable world became clear as they privileged an ethical and principled engagement with both Muslim and non-Muslim voices rather than focusing on the *ends* of product at the expense of the *means* of relationships. Given that our nation is undertaking a serious reexamination of itself via its relationship to others, the work that *Generation (Wh)Y* did in encountering both self and Other gives its approach an added gravitas, one that we urge fellow practitioners to leverage.

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Note

1. Alongside Georgetown, LaGuardia Community College in New York City's borough of Queens also received a grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation as part of its Building Bridges program. The students from LaGuardia, who served as guides to escort audience members to the various spaces around DPAC, were engaged in a separate devised project at their own institution concerning similar themes. Georgetown and LaGuardia students tested interview questions with one another via Skype, which were then used separately in each institution's independent process. LaGuardia students shared their devised piece with us.

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