

Ways With Worlds: Bringing Improvisational Theater Into Play With Reading

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ABSTRACT

The authors investigated improvisational theater and the possibilities that it presents for reconsidering reading pedagogy, with a focus on discussions of reading. The authors conducted empirical, qualitative studies of improvisational practice and instruction and analyzed improv through the construct of worlding. In this article, the authors explore different dimensions of worlding, a concept that generally describes how ensembles make present and create unique events in time. Next, the authors offer a vision of reading discussions that emerges from rethinking and refeeling such discussions through forms of worlding found in improvisation. The authors conclude by offering five improv-inspired teaching practices for discussions of reading: (1) teaching as invoking the text, (2) teaching as exchanging offers, (3) teaching as attuning, (4) teaching as following lines of flight, and (5) teaching as activating embodied energy.

*I*¹ don't know what to do.
I'm ready to teach. My mind is blank. I don't really have a plan. Yet, I do. My body does. I've taught this many times before. Practice and repetition enter the room with me. The movements that students will engage, the worlds that they will make, and the sense that they will make of it all never happen the same way. Yet, the moment we are about to share feels familiar to me even as I expect us to produce something new, something different. I am accustomed to this energy, even as I am nervous, knowing that it is impossible to predict what will happen next.

The object is the energy, I think or maybe feel to myself. If there's an objective, it is to animate the energies between us and follow that energy toward new possibilities.

I invite people to join me in a circle. People leave their phones and walk to an empty space in the middle of a large room. It is early evening, and our bodies are close. The improv class begins.

Fifty-five years earlier, Rosenblatt (1964) reported on a group of readers, mainly high school English teachers, interpreting a four-line Robert Frost poem, "It Bids Pretty Fair." Rosenblatt focused on a group's interpretive work, reading their social process as emergent. They did not know what to do. Yet, they did. Rosenblatt paid attention to their messy, divergent thought processes. She was fascinated by the questions and guesses in the group, the wild connections that they made (to their experiences in theater, to the Elizabethan theater, to the weather, and to the hydrogen bomb). She described the readers as active, as

“shuttling back and forth” (p. 125), and as saturated with feeling; intensive affect and meaning making went hand in hand.

Throughout this article, we sustain the juxtaposition of a group of improvisers to a group of readers encountering a text. Readers, like improvisers, are collectively involved in the process of making sense and in the magic of feeling and wondering. Rosenblatt (1964) was taken by the creative work of the readers engaged in a process that was “at once intensely personal...and intensely social” (p. 126). Speaking in a language that would feel familiar to improvisers, she wrote of the poem coming to be as a kind of happening, an event:

A poem...must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It is an occurrence, a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text his past experience; the encounter gives rise to a new experience, a poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being—aesthetic, ethical, or metaphysical. (p. 126)

The making of the poem is a set of text–world and reader–world relations that create a new experience; there will never be the same poem as there was in that moment. Similarly, improvisers co-compose scenes, some world that was never there before and would never be there again. In both instances, something entirely singular happened. Then, the tide rolls in and pulls it out to sea.

What can we make of the connection between the circled-up improvisers and Rosenblatt’s (1964) circled-up readers? How might this connection spark something new, something unknown? In this article, we engage in an empirical and conceptual investigation of that connection—tapping these two wires together, as it were, looking for sparks. From Rosenblatt and others who have seen discussions of reading as imaginative and joyful world conjuring, our work recovers such sensibilities at a time when the freedom and play of making new poems, at every collective reading, is being squelched by increasing trends toward standardization and uniformity in education. As a recovery project of joy and imagination, impulses that have been in the field of reading for a long time, we offer an extended investigation and meditation into the practices of theatrical improvisation.

Improvisational theater presents possibilities for exploring worlding, a concept in affect theory and process philosophy described in detail later, in relation to reading discussions. Historically, research toward improving discussions, including but not limited to discussions of reading, has approached the topic from many angles, including structures of participation (Cazden, 1988; Nystrand, 1997), the development of dialogic teaching and learning (Matusov, 2011; O’Connor & Michaels, 2007; Wells & Mejia Arauz, 2006), the prompting and sustaining of intertextual or multivoiced relations (Bloome, Carter,

Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2004; Kamberelis, 2001), the development of higher quality teacher and student questions (Nystrand, 1997; Raphael & Au, 2005), and the implementation of dramatic methods to imaginatively interpret texts (Edmiston, 2011; Taylor & Warner, 2006; Wolf, Edmiston, & Enciso, 1997). Recognizing the significance of these bodies of work, we take a different and somewhat sideways approach in this article.

Discussions of reading, we posit, are lacking affective vitality as much as they are lacking comprehension, questions, meaning, or anything else. What if reading classrooms were a space for playful social dreaming, where completely singular events happened, never to be reproduced? What if classrooms were filled with potential for thinking differently about the world outside the classroom, all in relation to a shared text? To consider these questions, we looked away from the reading classroom and turned to improv. Importantly, we were not looking to improvisation as a metaphor but as a dramatic practice that has developed in idiosyncratic ways over the last hundred years. Table 1 provides a brief overview of phrases and concepts from improv practice that are used throughout this article. Ultimately, we extend what Tanner (2019) described as the “improvisational ethos” that can emerge from sustained engagement with practices of improv and might cultivate “a shared commitment to affirming and validating the existence and experience of others” (p. 30). Turning to these practices and this ethos in education offered a way for us to think about facilitating and participating in discussions of reading as the affectively intense work of shuttling toward the unknown as collectively composed worlds come into being.

Before proceeding, it is important to acknowledge some of the investments and politics at stake in this article. All three of us are practicing improvisers and literacy education scholars. Further, we are two middle-class, cis-heterosexual white men and one middle-class white woman. Our work grapples with power, privilege, and our intersecting social identities and positions. We are committed to social justice and criticality through our educational work, during our previous years as secondary school teachers and improvisers and now in our research and university-level teaching. Although it is not explicitly the point of this article, we see this work with improvisation as a critical contribution toward efforts to challenge the status quo because it provides an alternative to rationalistic, teleological, and prescriptive educational traditions. The art of improv, illuminated by the concept of worlding, helps us wonder how we might approach critical pedagogy and social justice education a little differently. What if at least one of the purposes of reading discussions was not only to support students’ rational analyses of social injustices in hopes of catalyzing their involvement in social or political action but also to cultivate the capacity for students to engage different ways of

TABLE 1
Improvisational Theater Terms

Phrase or concept	General description
Theatrical improvisation or improv	In this dramatic art, people create unscripted theater in groups through different games, exercises, or forms.
Short-form and long-form improvisation	Short-form improv uses games to create comedy. The popular show <i>Whose Line Is It Anyway?</i> popularized short-form improv. Long-form improv, unlike short-form improv, does not rely on games and is not inherently comedic. Long-form improvisers take a suggestion and create a set of unscripted theatrical scenes that might last anywhere from 20 minutes to two hours.
A suggestion	A suggestion is a word, phrase, sound, or physical movement that an improv ensemble elicits from an audience in long-form improv to inspire a scene or set.
An opener	An opener is a practice in long-form improv that generates content, attunement, and connectivity that inspires the scenes or sets that follow.
An improv move or offer	An improv move or offer is any spoken, embodied, or nonverbal utterance that happens during improv.
Improv exercises	Improv exercises are often used in improv rehearsals to cultivate improvisational practices.
An improv form	Improv forms are different versions of long-form improv. Each form has logics and rules that create a structure for improvisation. There are countless forms in improvisational theater. Improvisers choose a form to do during a performance or what they refer to as a set.
Yes, and...	“Yes, and...” is an improvisational philosophy that requires improvisers to accept and add to offers made during the improv. This is the idea that everything that happens in an improvised scene must be accepted, affirmed, and added onto. This does not mean that participants need to agree with or like every idea that is offered; it means that they need to work in affirmation with the offering as opposed to negating or playing against the material that emerges in a scene.
Nonevaluative participation	This is an improvisational philosophy that requires improvisers not to evaluate, positively or negatively, their work or the work of others during improv.
Scene partners	Scene partners are any individuals involved in an improv game, exercise, or form.
Ensemble	An ensemble is a group of people engaged in a particular improv exercise or form.
Groupmind	This is the way an ensemble incorporates multiple, individual voices into a single text.
The ball of energy	The ball of energy as described in this article is an imaginary focus that the group shares during improv games, exercises, or forms.
Story swap opener	This is a game used in this article in which the players are first given a prompting word or phrase and then start to tell stories as a collective.
Collaborative storytelling	Participants in this improv exercise stand in a circle and tell a shared story by adding one line at a time.
Small Town	This long-form improv requires improvisers to play the same characters in a fixed location for the duration of the set.

encountering, being, and feeling together in the present unfolding moment? What if, along with focusing on students’ words in reading discussions, we sought to instruct them in new ways of attending deeply to one another’s affective experiences as they imaginatively think, feel, and if just for a moment, create new worlds?

We continue by gathering focus and energy around the idea of worlding in our investigation of improvisational theater and the possibilities that it presents for reconsidering discussions of reading. Drawing on theory that moves outside the foci typically used for framing discussions of reading, we apply an improvisational ethos for the duration of this article to unframe these discussions through process philosophy and poststructural approaches to worlding—the creation and presencing of

unique events in time by collectives. Next, we present three movements that draw on our study and experience with improvisational theater to animate concepts that we explore in this article. Finally, we discuss how forms of worlding in theatrical improvisation could inform discussions of reading by describing practices of teaching inspired by an improvisational ethos. We focused our writing on two key questions:

1. What does an analysis of routine practices in improvisational theater make evident about how worlding comes about in improv?
2. How might the practices of worlding in improvisational theater guide us toward reimagining worlding practices in discussions of reading?

Evocations of Worlding as Immanence

We call ourselves out: in the middle, in the milieu. We write with and through theory to come before the data, to stand above them and ask them questions. Yet, things are not so simple, so separate, and so hierarchical. We read theory with improvisation in our bodies, bodies wired to practices, to repetitions, to already implications. These pages before us connect, stories within them spark our imaginations, most of what we know falls to the cutting-room floor. A few things are kept and scattered within the simultaneity: that sticky story, the feeling of that quote, an image that will not shake. We read theory, we retell, we move with it. Yet, we are not a theory mirror; we are not outside concepts. We are like improvisers; we become, we travel to know, and we resist our desires to know already.

In the background is improvisation. We read or frame improvisation as practice, through a foreground of theory to follow. Yet, such background–foreground relations are just preferred, normalized accounts of an idealized research march forward. In writing theory about worlding, we engage already in a process of worlding, spreading our embodied experiences with improvisation out on a plane with concepts and with the desire to evoke the experience of worlding presently, for our readers. We make four evocations with worlding in what follows, each as an invitation to join worlding with some other concept. These evocations are not intended to function as definitions of worlding (each contributing to a known whole concept) but rather as attempts to enliven the potentials of the concept of worlding by bringing it into different relations. First, and staying close to the concept of immanence, we call up the relation of worlding and presencing. Second, we stir up the relation of worlding to heterogeneity and movement, taking up the differences and intensities created in the assemblages made through worlding. Third, we take up the idea of texts more directly and their relations to worlding, asking how texts might be opened up and enlivened through these relations. Finally, we conjure up the relation of worlding to attunement: How do affective pushes and pulls shape worldings in a certain way, with a certain feel?

Worlding and Presencing

Heidegger (1962) fashioned the term *worlding* to describe the world's dynamic presencing as experienced by human beings. All organisms and environments live through constant processes of flux; even rocks exist in states of perpetual transformation (Watts, 2014). For Heidegger, this worlding indicates the way the world presents itself through human consciousness. *Welten* (worlding) and *dasein* (existence) are mutually constitutive and coextensive; "*welten* [worlding] means to exist, to be human;

conversely, existing is worlding" (Groth, 2004, p. 82). The world is thus neither an object nor an entity; rather, in its worldings, the world makes itself felt through a series of events. The gerund captures the indeterminacy and emergence of our experience of worlding, an ontological mode of being that suggests the infinity and openness of possible meanings rather than their closure (Arnold & Keiling, 2016).

To explain further, Heidegger (1962) invited his students to consider the lectern from which he delivered his lecture. He asked them to note that the lectern was drawn into their consciousness not in isolation but inextricably interconnected with other objects (e.g., books) and positioned within a broader environment (the lecture hall), imbued with social relationships (e.g., teacher, student, friend, ex-lover) and memories (e.g., of their journey to the school) and saturated with desires (e.g., the dreams propelling them to study). Likewise, in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (In Search of Lost Time), Proust's tea-drenched madeleine cookie worlds by calling forth a host of recollections spanning space, time, and place; "Proust dunks his madeleine in his tea—and the universe of Cambrai unfolds" (Safranski, 1999, p. 96).

Worlding and Heterogeneity-in-Movement

Heidegger's (1962) process philosophy later influenced the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and their philosophy of processes through which different elements of all kinds come into relation with one another into moving, temporary configurations of elements from entirely different categories of how the world is commonly organized; objects, ideas, elements, materials, humans, and nonhumans move into unpredictable relations. Moreover, "semiotic chains of every nature" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7) are formed by connections among things of different phenomenological statuses. Everything is always plugged into assemblages through the eternal flow of time, movement, and other material and semiotic relations. Assemblages are dynamic, assembling and reassembling and reassembling again.

When heterogeneous elements are brought together in the temporary coming together of an assemblage, these things are experienced through their connections to one another. The idea that interconnected differences, multiplicities, are formed through processes of movement and connection is a significant shift away from a notion of worlding that would consider separate elements of a world to have identity prior to their relations. It is also a shift away from a systems perspective on worlding that would wish to hold the system still for analysis.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) described the relations within assemblages via the process metaphor of the rhizome. The rhizome is a way of describing the qualities of

movement, dynamism, and difference creation through which assemblages of all sorts come together, qualities that include “variation, expansion, conquest, and capture” (p. 21). Rather than having root (treelike) structures, rhizomes move in every direction. Perhaps one of the most useful images of the rhizome that Deleuze and Guattari offered is simply “when rats swarm over each other” (p. 5). Here, we are offered pure movement, coming together in an entangled mass, a temporary assemblage.

Worlding and Putting Texts Into Movement

Two additional principles from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) that create connection and movement for conceiving of worlding, especially in relation to reading, discussing, or creating texts, are mapping and tracing. Tracing (decalcomania, associated with the term *decal*) is a process of reproduction, whereas mapping (cartography) is a process of movement and openness. Placing tracings (e.g., reproductions, copies, texts) back into the field of possibilities (movement) serves to “connect the roots or trees back up with a rhizome” (p. 12).

The relations of tracing to mapping create ways of reimagining the relations of the text (or book) to the world, in a process of worlding. In fact, for Deleuze and Guattari (1987), much of their own consideration of the rhizome is a discussion of how to consider their own text, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in its relation to the world. For them, the book is not a deep structure or history of the world (a tracing) and does not represent the world:

Contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, this is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can). (p. 11)

The world(ing) of the world and the world(ing) of the book are always already connected, rhizomatically. These worldings enter into relations with each other, creating new assemblages, relations of energy and affective intensity. Such relations are not reflections, hybrids, or alternative worlds. Rather, such relations are movements of connection and multiplicity, creating emergent assemblages that resist prediction, that escape (deterritorialize), that reproduce patterns (reterritorialize), and that are at play on the same plane of becoming. Drawing from Grosz’s (2017) theory of the incorporeal (her thinking was inspired by Deleuze and Guattari), these movements might be thought of as orientations of concepts and thoughts, entwinements, that enable “the creation of a philosophy or a work of art...[through] emergence and evolution of life in its growing complexity” (p. 250).

In relation to discussion of reading, the readers and the text come together in joint worlding. Breger (2017) illuminated these relations, writing from narrative theory:

Through the distributed agency of nonsovereign actors—including but not limited to authors, narrators, characters, and readers in the literary circuit, these processes constitute narrative worlds as multidimensional, ‘multivectoral’ assemblages: configurations in which the presumably interruptive, variously vertical, horizontal, and orthogonal axes of affect and sensation, along with association and memory, intertextuality and trope all contribute to...action and analysis. (p. 231)

The idea of “multidimensional, ‘multivectoral’ assemblages” brings together well the concepts of heterogeneity-in-movement and putting texts into movement.

Worlding and Affective Attunement

In worlding, “things matter not because of how they are represented but because they have qualities, rhythms, forces, relations, and movements” (Stewart, 2011, p. 445). Sensing the circuits of affective energy that are lit up as worlding happens is one way to describe attunement. Stay with that image: Some sensory equipment (e.g., eyes, ears, arm hair) become ready, vigilant, active:

One moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hyper-vigilance that collects the material that might help to...maintain one’s sea legs. (Berlant, 2010, p. 4)

This activity is relational: The hairs on the arm are responding to the cold shower water, to the sand, to the hairs on another’s arm. Such affecting and being affected feels like attunement when it is keyed up, responsive, most vibrant.

Still, attuning is not merely action and reaction. When bits of the assemblage are taken up in relation to one another, are connected by rhizomatic circuit, that connection has some quality, some feel, some sense that this connection in this moment is unique, is singular. Also, across the assemblage, attuning happens among bodies, words, and objects of all sorts, human and nonhuman: “The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12). A child attunes to her mother’s tense face, the mother attunes to the news on the television, the news announcer attunes to the term “street gang” on-screen, and the child, mother, news announcer, and term transfer a circuit of fear becoming.

Amid their relations to other bodies, some bodies are evocative of world becomings, circuits of a certain kind, a certain affective push. As if worlding sometimes picked up fractals, and these fractals energized world becomings of a certain kind, “someone utters ‘Springtucky’ out of

context and an attunement cascades. [Lines of articulation provoke an] entanglement of bodies, histories, classrooms, spaces, accents, futures, clothing, coal dust, wordings” (Stewart, 2016, p. 97). Something small can evoke and provoke an atmospheric attunement (Stewart, 2011) of a particular kind; the opener in an improvisational long-form sequence is similar to the opening of everyday attunements:

The worlding of the place accreted out of opening events. A story, a gesture, a look, or an outbreak of the nerves would establish a trajectory and pick up crazy speed or disperse, or settle into a still life, or blanket the place like a premonition spontaneously generated in the lives of all those attuned. (p. 447)

Such openings, in a Deleuzian sense, are not centers but rather ignited worldings in an early moment that are on the move to collect and connect; they are dust devils on the plain, stirring and sucking up dirt, moving things that were not even visible on the horizon before they began to spin.

Still, the evocative energy of movement in worlding, and the affective attunement in a world’s becoming, is entirely different from the representational tendency to name, identify, encapsulate. Writing of her stepson’s movement into homelessness, for instance, Stewart (2011) recounted a kind of commonplace simplification of homelessness as “abject poverty without a safety net or as if it’s just a matter of personal blame or failure” (p. 450). Such external representations leave out the unique affective attunements of what her stepson John was experiencing in becoming homeless: “[Homelessness] is also an attunement to a singular world’s texture and shine. The body has to learn to play itself like a musical instrument in this world’s compositions” (p. 450). We might come to sense out, sniff out, the immanence of world becoming, that sense of something that is powerfully ripe to pick up motion, to collect. In this way, we might become attuned to the horizon of possibilities. Another metaphor of attunement that inspired us is that in the following lines (Ehret, 2018; Ingold, 2015):

Like the stems of plants growing from their seeds,...such lines trace the paths of the world’s becoming—its ‘worlding’—rather than connecting up, in reverse, sequences of points already traversed. Moreover, what goes for the kite-in-the-air, it its thinging, also goes for the flyer-on-the-ground. (Ingold, 2011, p. 215)

Lines, not points, become energized in circuits of affect; lines vibrate, lines have qualities of this type of connection rather than that, lines trace the movement of energy in all directions, lines lead toward becoming. For Ingold (2011), drawing helps us reimagine worlding, where, in real time, there is a becoming of “an ever-unfolding relation between observant eyes, gesturing

hands and their descriptive trace” (p. 225). To think of worlding as drawing, rather than worlding as *a* drawing, moves us out of a representational perspective and allows affective attunement to come alive in the midst of process, along the lines of the drawing’s becoming. Following lines, as a mapping of attunement, leads to a sense of the directionality of the line in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) sense. Is this a line of articulation and segmentarity, reproductive and reterritorializing? How is that attuning other lines of segmentarity to join up? What is the feel? Or, is it a line of flight? What new attuning is coming to be? Moreover, the movement of energy along the lines has qualities of attunement. Sensing these circuits involves sensing “comparative rates of flow[,]...relative slowness and viscosity,...acceleration and rupture[,]...and measurable speeds” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 3–4), and “lived affects with tempos, sensory knowledges, orientations, transmutations, habits, rogue force fields” (Stewart, 2011, p. 446).

Three Movements: Improvisers, Improv, and Improv Pedagogy

There are, for us, countless ways to connect the previous discussion of worlding with the practice of improv and, from there, the work of participating in or facilitating a discussion of reading. Intuitively, we feel that making these connections is important; they certainly have been central in our work as teachers, thinkers, and scholars. Yet, we resist the representational compulsion to sort and organize the data that we have gathered concerning improv and teaching in relation to the prior review of literature. Instead, we continue by turning to conceptual writing grounded in empirical evidence that brings the reader into relation with improv, improvisers, and improv pedagogy. Our writing in these movements is intended to presence the reader in practices of improv that we closely studied in collaboration with our peers, teachers, and students to animate our thinking about worlding in relation to the research questions we asked at the outset about discussions of reading. Our two-year study of improvisers included field notes about our teaching and practice, autoethnographic journaling, and interviews with improvisers. Still, we do not offer some comprehensive report of this activity, as we feel that doing so would limit the vitality of the practice. Instead, we share three different data movements, not to create an exhaustive list of connections and implications between improvisation and discussions of reading but, rather, to move toward new assemblages with the reader, in the same way that improvisers work together in an ensemble.

These data movements assembled in this section—indeed, our writing as a whole—is intended as at least a

partial experimentation with writing that welcomes the way heterogeneous elements, ourselves, our data, and theory are brought together in the temporary coming together of this assemblage, this singular worlding. An orientation exists, but it does so in relation to what Grosz (2017) described as “an entwinement with a material order, planets, stars, constellations, nebulae, and so on, beyond us, and a world of objects, things, processes, and events that constitute materiality on earth” (p. 250). We are both the materiality available to us and the world beyond us. The idea that differences (multiplicities) are formed through processes of movement and connection is a significant shift away from a notion of worlding that would consider separate elements of a world to have identity prior to their relations. It is also a shift away from a systems perspective on worlding that would wish to hold the system still for analysis. The method or orientation of our writing was inspired by Stewart’s (2007) work that “does not find magical closure or even seek it,” instead laying out links between theory and experience “as a point of impact, curiosity, and encounter” (p. 5).

We expect that our conceptual method here, as writing practice, research, and theory, could be disorienting for the reader, so we are explicit about our form. In this section, we move between active and passive voice and use three asterisks (***) , as we did at the outset, to signify jumps from narration to interpretation or from one moment or location to another. We begin with improvisers talking about their improv practices, then move to a specific improv troupe reflecting on a set, and finish with an improv teacher describing his pedagogy in first person. These movements are based on interviews, recordings of improv, and autoethnographic field notes. The improvisers are our friends, colleagues, teachers, and students; we move, imagine, and play with them here as we do when we improvise with them in our lives. We make slight interjections and interpretations in our movements, but for the most part, we save our discussion of our research questions until after we finish the three movements.

Movement 1: An Assembled Dialogue on Worlding

As a first data movement, we created a movement that both illustrates and animates the practice of an opener in long-form improv. An opener uses a suggestion from the audience to generate energy, material, and attunement that cues the improv to come. In this particular case, we use a story swap opener, in which the players are given a suggestion and then share a few short story monologues that respond to the prompt. After these stories, members of the ensemble offer increasingly shorter contributions (story segments or ideas), jumping in on one another’s talk more rapidly. This opener typically finishes with two

or three of the players moving out of the story swap and into an improv scene, which will develop the world building already begun into a particular direction.

We constructed the following opener out of extensive interview data gathered from five highly experienced theatrical improvisers, three of whom have been improv instructors for the second and third authors. The other two performers interviewed are members of the same improv company. We put the improvisers into dialogue with one another in our opener as an attempt to convey a felt sense of the practice (its affective intensities, as movement). We did this to avoid overrationalizing the practices of improvisers with themes or codes that would likely diminish the energy of the work. Additionally, presenting these data as individual interview segments alone could do a different kind of damage to thinking and feeling the practice by locating the practice in the individual rather than the ensemble. Therefore, we offer our constructed opener, an imaginative reconstruction of data intended to evoke an experience, while also providing material for analysis and reflection that will serve us in thinking about discussions of reading. Our story swap opener is punctuated by interpretive comments, in italics, where we analytically describe some of the improv practices and worlding concepts that are (made) available in it. This movement begins with the suggestion “scene world,” and all names that appear in all three movements are pseudonyms except Sam’s.

Director: OK, let’s get started. Your prompt from the audience is the phrase “scene world.”

Phil: Just the other night, I started out with—my scene partner was onstage, and she was holding something out in front of her. I didn’t know what it was, but my first reaction was—to what she was holding, a little off in the distance—we probably spent a good minute, maybe a minute and a half, without identifying what it was but gaining fear of it. And it turned out, it was a lemon. And I was scared of the lemon because I didn’t like the way it stared at me with its one eye. And she was just trying to get me to be a grown man, because how are we gonna have a lemonade stand without lemons? And then at one point, the lemon—you know, another person in the group—stuck his head up on her hand and became the talking lemon, and was threatening me, but showing her how nice he was, you know? That two-faced sort of deal. That was a lot of fun. It was very simple, you know. Fear got brought in, to me, by the way she was postured. It was the

way she was holding whatever it was that she had. It looked like she wasn't 100% comfortable with it, or maybe wasn't 100% comfortable with me, and this was her safety net, and so I decided to absorb all the fear and take low status, let her have high status, and be afraid of whatever it was. And she's the one that identified it as a lemon, you know, and that was perfect. And I was her husband, and so the relationship came right out of that. The relationship and what it was came right out of that initial posturing and taking our time to really settle into what it could be...So, I just decided to settle in the silence of that fear, and I started walking around the stage at different vantage points to what this object was, just trying to find a safe place where I could actually look at it, and—and try to not be afraid of it.

Andy: Worldmaking for me is not important as a goal. What's important for me is that I genuinely feel the perspective of my character, this version of me that's repressed or edited out in the day-to-day. But onstage, there's permission to be your most visceral, emotive ID something. So, once those glasses are on, those colored glasses of whatever that emotion is—and they're firmly there, and that's the commitment, and I'm just only seeing and hearing through that lens—the world comes into being. But I see it; it's already kind of there. I just—there's no thought. It just somehow instinctively starts to emerge. And it's almost like, um—I don't know what video game it was, but the characters were—it was like you were looking down on them as they walked through a maze. But only the area around them was lit up? You can only see the areas you're moving around? I feel it's kind of like that. I feel like wherever I walk around with my scene partner, I start to see things in our immediate environment. I don't necessarily see anything larger...It's almost like you're walking through this dark place of unknown. And then you see where you're going, and you see where your characters are going, and then, Oh, here's an opening over here! Let's go down here! If I dart down this side passage, because now it's available. Previously, it wasn't available. It was just a wall. But now, there's an opening. Let's go in here! It's like

we're exploring. And we go down exploring, and hopefully he or she comes with me, and if my scene partner goes, I go with them. Once we split apart—again, the analogy is very helpful—we're just kind of alone in the scene. We're not really feeding off of each other. We're not really informing each—

Laura: Let's say that a player—you've set up this cathedral scene, and they are sipping a Miller Lite, sitting in a hot tub. I would not say that that's always a great move. That might be a bit of a steamroll move, which is that—the reason that improv's golden rule is “yes, and...” is that we have to say that makes sense in that space. And so, you have put some onus on your scene partners to justify that. And so when you choose such a disparate choice, it is making it more difficult, especially if the scene has already progressed forward quite a bit, and that's like such—it's so out of left field? It just makes a challenge for everybody else. But it's—if it's at the beginning...then it still can become something amazing, which is we now. It has to be about that. It has to be about how strange it is that there's this hot tub, and we have to figure out why there's this hot—

Let's first consider some of the elements of improv practice embedded in the opener thus far. As the opener begins, we have three different offers prompted by the phrase “scene world.” At this point, the activity is somewhat parallel play: Offers are built more or less around the opening concept. Andy and Phil both express how much of their practice is built around character—how an emotional commitment to character drives the sense of what could unfold and also how characters make offers to one another that contribute to their emotional becoming, such as Phil's account of the threatening lemon voice helping him move into the character of the low-status husband. Laura's offer also makes evident how the idea of “yes, and...” can be highly challenging when a scene partner makes a disparate choice (which may feel like a “steamroll move”), and yet the rule of doing “yes, and...” binds one to say and act as if “that makes sense in that space.”

Perhaps the best evidence of attunement is in the scene account given by Phil, who describes how he and his scene partner were creating a common feeling of something while cocreating that thing itself: “We probably spent a good minute, maybe a minute and a half, without identifying what it was but gaining fear of it.” An attunement to the fear of the lemon provided for the emergence of

characters (husband, wife, and one-eyed lemon), status relations, and actions (distanced walk) in the emerging scene world. Andy's description of exploring an emergent scene is a wonderful illustration of worlding and presencing as practice that is distributed among scene partners. As they walk together and explore, Andy notes, "I start to see things in our immediate environment." The activity of being with another, in character(s), activates the scene in the practice of worlding, which in turn activates a set of possibilities for the characters: "Previously, it wasn't available. It was just a wall. But now, there's an opening. Let's go in here!"

Let's return to the opener as it continues.

Andy: I was in a scene, in a restaurant, with my scene partner..., and you know the round thing that's often in a window at a restaurant, you know, like Mel's Diner? And it's like "Order up," and you put the ticket in there, and you spin it around. And my character grabbed it. And in my imagination, it was so vivid, I saw it, but all the paper flew off. And before I even knew it, my hand was chasing all the papers everywhere. And then it affected me because then they got on the floor of the kitchen, which is greasy and mucky with, like, egg white and spilled oil and like, shoe goo and whatever's on there. And they just were, like, illegible. And it just affected my character. It was like, "God dammit! We got a house full of people and I don't know what to cook!"

Sid: So, even if I have a concept for how this could go, or even if I have an idea for the relationship that's going to be present, that's only gonna go as far as what the next line of dialogue is, because that next line of dialogue could completely reorient whatever sense of reality we're creating. And at times, that's frustrating, sure, but I think that's part of the art, too, is learning to be OK with, "Hey, we're making this together."

Phil: When you go into a scene, you're walking into the unknown, and there's always an element of fear in the unknown. Even the most seasoned improv performers have that first initial—heart beats a little faster, you don't really know what you're getting into, and once you settle into it, it's comfortable. It's very warm, it's very welcoming, it's very familiar. It becomes a place of confidence instead of a place of fear or—

Laura: It feels scary, sometimes, when you're the one to—cause often there's the line that is said that really changes everything, and it's like you know that it—you can feel it. When it happens, the best way for me is that you know it's gonna be you, and like when you're playing outfield, and—ugh!—you see this ball coming, and you know you're the one that has to catch it, but there is some time, right before, when you know it's happening? You feel it coming, and it gets kind of—that anticipation is scary, and that's why being in the scene and being present is so import—

Andy's account of the scene, like Mel's Diner where the ticket holder spun off all of the paper orders onto the "mucky" floor, is a compelling illustration of how players presence a world. In the midst of Andy's account, it is easy to forget that there is no diner, no orders, no mucky floor; these are all made present in the scene, moving from Andy's imagination, through his hands and expressions, into the space, onto the floor, and into relationship with his scene partner as an offer of a world that is becoming. Also note in Andy's account that his character is coming to be in relation to the material world that Andy is creating through his actions in space: The character intra-acts with these materials, becoming angry and exasperated. Yet, the contributions of Sid, Phil, and Laura in turn bring out how contingent any assemblage in improv is: Things can become pulled apart and reordered quickly from a next line of dialogue (Sid) or from catching or not catching an offer thrown out to you (Laura). Worlding in this way involves the temporary coming together of heterogeneous elements that can be reordered, and in the midst of this reordering, players are often anxious and excited, and sometimes frustrated in their attempts to bring order. In contrast, note that Phil talks about becoming "settle[d] into" these unpredictable and heterogeneous movements as something that inspires confidence over fear.

Andy: There's a way in which a scene might raise those stakes emotionally and then transform into something else, a way in which a scene might raise them again and then transform and then raise them again, like this kind of returning to it. And that could be a gesture, that could be a phrase, that could be pause, it could be anything.... Allow the emotions to kind of wave—rise and then fall, and then rise and then fall. And we did a lot of repeats where we were in two-person scenes, and we were working together to feed off—

Corey: If you've got an engaged audience that's really enjoying it, you can feed off of that, and that gives you more confidence as an actor. And in improv, you can go, "This isn't working. We're gonna try this..." The audience, really how they relate to the energy, really changes—

Sid: Audience members can see, OK, that dude clearly preloads his jokes, or that was clearly rammed in there because that person wanted to make a *Parks and Rec[reation]* reference. Um, but every time those things are done, they almost break the sanctity of this new thing that we're creating—

Phil: Changes in energy are important because that's, again, reality. How many times have you been in the course of your day, and you think it's gonna go one direction, but then it goes six different directions, all within, you know, a couple of hours of each other? And you gotta shift and move and bob and weave and do all that—

Our constructed opener is intended to create some feeling of building energy across the players. In their talk turns, the improvisers emphasize the ebbs and flows of energy in scene work as something that happens, as true to life (Phil) and as something that is also a desirable affect of scene work (Andy). The course of affect rising and falling is associated by Andy with transformations through movements of heterogeneous elements in the scene, such as the movement of gesture or the speaking of a phrase. Along with these, and as affected by their movements, energy itself is undergoing transformation in the scene. With respect to energy, the boundary between the players and the audience is weak: The audience response changes the energy of the scene (Corey), and contrived moves by improvisers can break these modes of attunement in affective worlding; a relationship of world, players, and audience that is described as having a kind of "sanctity" (Sid).

Corey: Just like anything else, you have to rehearse, you have to get comfortable, you have to keep stretching that brain. It's almost like...you can't keep a tree from setting deep roots unless you keep disturbing it. Unless you keep rehearsing, you're going to have those roots of life dig in. And while life tells you to do X, Y, and Z, improv on the other hand tells you to—

Sid: You can set people up for these moments, and that thing feels just so flawless and so magical. And I guess the best way to really

describe it is that it is like going back to that cafeteria table in high school, where you're just riffing, and those moments when you're laughing so hard with your friends and you can't breathe—

Corey: One of the guys who's in the troupe now was watching and goes, "That was just amazing!" and it was just because we were connected to each other. We weren't two individuals—

Laura: Just if you kind of have this idea that we're working together, and it's sort of pulling—it's all making sense. It feels like magic, it feels fun, it feels easy. All it feels like is I don't have to think—

Corey: It was this weird little magic in a bottle moment. It was just so intense. It was just the two of us and each doing that—

Andy: They're really close to each other. And even if you just did nothing else, it would be entertaining. It seems like a magic thing. How do they do that? And it's so simple.... It's not pushing, it's not driving, it's not agenda-driven. It's just opening your eyes and almost passively being accepting of what's there.

Director: End scene!

As our opener comes to a close, Corey offers the metaphor of unsettling the rooted tree through rehearsal. Although rehearsal may often be associated with rootedness (repetition and mastery), Corey sees these "roots of life" as in need of unsettling. His description nicely parallels Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) contrast of the deep rootedness of a tree to the rhizome-like connections, branching off, just under the soil, in every direction. Rehearsing improv leads to unsettling as routine. Also, these forms of unsettling, and comovement with and through the emergence of the scene, can feel like "magic" (Laura, Corey, and Andy). What are the qualities of magic? Among them are surprise, wonder, and a lack of understanding of how all of the singular movements make up the whole. Our opener began with "scene world" and ended with "magic."

Let's see how this movement carries the improvisers into their scenes to come.

Movement 2: Worlding in an Improv Performance

Our second movement animates an ensemble that Sam has performed with for over three years as they participate in a 20-minute long-form set called Small Town.

Small Town is a form in which Sam, Angela, Jason, and Pete explore the relationships between characters in connected scenes who share a common location elicited as a suggestion from the audience at the opening of the set—in this case, “golf course.”

Jason and Pete open with a group move: They are two young, male entrepreneurs who created an innovative catheter. In the next scene, Angela and Sam discover that they are two middle-aged women. They lament about experiencing menopause. Sam’s character admits that she discovered feminism at a local bowling alley and became upset with her son, Jason’s character, for his patriarchal participation in capitalism. Angela’s character is Pete’s character’s big sister from the Big Sister/Litter Brother program. Angela’s character grows concerned about learning that her little brother is in a romantic relationship with Sam’s character. The piece ends with Sam’s character revealing the affair to her son and attempting to make peace with Jason’s character. This Small Town lasted roughly 30 minutes and included eight scenes.

Sam and Pete recorded their conversation about the set one year later, after they both watched a video of the performance. The following short vignette, inspired by Pete’s reflective memos about his participation in this set, is intended to give a partial account of how he understood his participation in the improv. Pete’s memos are in italics. We make sense of his thinking with analytic memos after the vignette.

The initial offers by two of the improvisers, Pete and Jason, orient the movement of the group and the subsequent orientation of the set. Jason steps onstage confidently. Pete matches his energy. They are similar and celebrate their physical attunement. They discover that they have created something: a new catheter that will make them rich. Thirty seconds into the opening scene, one of them asks who accomplished this feat. Pete and Jason match intensity and, at the same time, shout, “We did!”

Damn, that was awesome group mind, Pete thinks. There wasn’t a single pause, no hesitation. I just came up and matched Jason’s energy, and then we built a similar way of thinking because we were both embodying similar characters.

The second scene of the set involves Sam and Angela. Angela steps out and begins moving a single chair onstage around. Sam does the same thing. They play with the chairs for a moment before sitting down. The energy is different from the first scene, but there is a similar attunement. Sam and Angela are playful, but they play slowly. They discover that they are old friends, older women. They met at a carnival and rode bumper cars together. Sam’s character has something she needs to talk about with Angela’s character.

“Your breasts?” Angela asks.

“Yes,” Sam says without pause, “my breasts.”

Pete watches from offstage, imagining his relationship with these new characters as the story emerges.

Sam slow-played this scene like he usually does, Pete thinks. Sam wasn’t expecting Angela to say breasts. But he did, and he said “yes, and...” to Angela’s brilliant move. This is going to drive the scene forward, probably drive the whole set forward.

The energy becomes frenetic during the middle of the set as the four improvisers begin to jump out quickly. There is a flow as they comment on one another’s offerings. Jason jokes that the bumper cars that Sam established should have been golf carts because that was what he thought they were at first. Sam comes out and loudly reminds the group that they *are* in bumper cars. Pete laughs and sets the next scene in a Ferris wheel. The four play with the setting.

We’re messing with each other now, Pete thinks. We’re having fun, reestablishing worlds to comment on each other’s moves. This group has such trust in each other. We can mess with each other onstage. There’s a kind of underlying flow of us surprising the audience, surprising each other, and just messing with stuff. This is so much fun.

We step back from the improvisers to make a few analytic comments about this improv. The orientation of this Small Town set was discovered in the first 30 seconds due to the mutual attunement between players within the ensemble. Pete and Jason used their bodies to match each other’s energy. Sam responded affirmatively to Angela’s surprising line of dialogue, “Your breasts?” An assemblage emerged as certain material was presented: feminism and the relationship between young men, older women, and capitalism. The improv group described here rehearses weekly and uses games and activities to practice group mind, or the ability to move, feel, and think together during improv. The repetitions that this group brought with them into this set fostered an expectation of heterogeneity-in-movement, a presencing that facilitated disciplined attunement to the fluctuations of the co-composed text. As Grosz (2017) suggested, “thought... does not simply erupt into existence from a mechanically regulated, thoroughly material world, no matter how complex” but, instead, comes from the “bodily organization of earlier and contemporaneous forms of life that come before and did not carry ideality, one of the conditions for human thought, within them” (p. 250). The worlding described in this second movement did not simply erupt but, rather, was plugged into a specific entwinement with materiality and thought, practice and repetition. The worlding emerged out of what Nate described as the group’s trust and allowed the improvisers to surprise and be surprised by each other as they shuttled toward the unknown in their improv, and surprisingly, the group engaged in a playful exploration on patriarchy, feminism, and entrepreneurship on a golf course.

Practicing attunement, as improvisers do, might cultivate orientations that help teachers pay attention to the worlding that happens when readers discuss texts. Certainly, there is something of Rosenblatt's (1964) discussion of the magic of making a poem together in the movements that we have presented thus far; the making of an improv scene is a set of relations of text-world and reader-world that create a new experience. Similarly, Rosenblatt showed us that readers co-compose a world that was never there before and will never be there again. Interestingly, improvisers rehearse embracing and creating these surprising singularities. Couldn't young readers also learn to move, feel, and think together in their discussions of text? Our final movement animates cultivating the capacity to move toward the unknown by turning to the pedagogy of a veteran improv teacher.

Movement 3: Worlding as Pedagogy in a Rehearsal

The improv class mentioned at the outset of this article continues as our third movement of data. Sam is the artistic director of a professional improv theater company. He leads weekly rehearsals for this group that are rooted in an improvisational pedagogy that emerged from his 20 years of teaching and directing improv. Kevin observed and took notes on the session described here. Those notes, in concert with Sam's reflective journal after the class, were used to inspire the following vignette. The improvisers described in this movement are members of Sam's company. We return to first person in this movement to capture Sam's narration and interpretation of their teaching before moving into our discussion.

I orient the group by naming two intentions as we stand in a circle.

"We are working to delight in the offers of our scene partners," I remind us, "to radically say, 'Yes, and...' to whatever happens."

Recall that "yes, and..." is the central idea of improv that everything that happens in an improvised scene must be accepted, affirmed, and added onto.

"We are practicing nonevaluative participation," I remind the group.

Energy is deflated when improvisers devote energy to critique their work or the work of others at the expense of their participation.

I read aloud a quote from Nachmanovitch (1990):

To either like or dislike our work for more than a moment can be dangerous. The judging voice asks, "Is this good enough?" But even if we create something really stupendous, sooner or later we have to perform again, and that inner judging voice is back again, saying, "It had better be better than the last time." Thus one's very talent can be a factor in blocking creativity. Either success or failure can turn that voice on.

The easiest way to do art is to dispense with success and failure altogether and just get on with it. (pp. 134–135)

"Eliminate the judgmental voice," I say. I'm saying it to myself, too. It is so easy to evaluate the improvisers as they work—their personalities, their quirks. "This voice that limits the universes we might make."

I'm anxious. There is always a frenetic feeling inside of me when I teach improv. I need to be present, to relax as we shuttle into the unknown. We need to prepare our bodies and our minds for that work.

"Please take one step back and stand up straight," I prompt us. "Let your arms rest at your side, and close your eyes."

I close my eyes, too.

"For better or worse," I tell us as we stand together in a circle, "we have an hour and a half to be together. So, when I count to 3, take a deep, energizing breath and quiet everything happening inside of you and around you. Try to be empty."

We breathe together three times. Kevin watches us. In his field notes, he writes that these breaths were "yoga-like" and signaled our entrance into an "event of energy."

Things began to emerge in the improv class.

"Let's practice saying 'Yes, and...' with delight," I tell the improvisers. I sense attunement in the group. They probably do, too. We are ready to enter into worlds through our improv after 45 minutes of participating in different improv exercises.

We stand in a circle. I hand an imaginary ball of energy to a person standing next to me.

"Give us the first line of a story," I tell the improviser. "Create a core for this world."

This person steps out and says something about brushing teeth. Bits of laughter sound around the circle. I try to avoid laughing. I do not want to give feedback or influence the work. This never really works. I giggle as the initiator hands the ball of energy to another person in the circle and takes the initiator's place. Another person makes an offer.

I pay close attention both to the person adding a line and to the people standing in our circle. I try to measure the intensity of the story and the group as the narrative grows, as the story emerges, as the energy sizzles and expands.

Eventually, after seven lines, somebody offers a line about being a world-class tooth brusher. People in the circle laugh. I sense that the world of this text is heightened to a reasonable conclusion. I clap my hands loudly to signal the end of the story.

"Take one step in!" I shout loudly. The attention comes back to me. I am worried that I am disrupting their flow, but I want to give some gentle feedback, an affirmation of what they have just done. The circle closes.

“Is there such thing as a world-class tooth brusher?” I ask the group with enthusiasm. I do not wait for an answer. “There absolutely is, in the world that you just created.”

Whatever gets stated in the circle becomes a truth in the moment, in our world.

“Take one step back!” I shout. “Let’s do it again.”

We tell a story about two people blowing bubble gum. The first person stumbles over words while offering the opening line. Instead of saying “bubble gum,” the person says, “Hubba bubba gubba.” Laughter fills the circle, and the group accepts this line and tells a story about “Hubba Bubba Gubba,” a gum that causes people to fall in love with each other.

There are no mistakes in improv, only gifts that, if the group accepts, create new possibilities. The only mistake is to assume a script, to name something as a mistake, thereby deflating the rise of energy. Strengthening and broadening the powers of the group, its capacity to enter into worlding, requires affirmation of the reality being presented in the assemblage. The improv class described here is a space where worlding magic is possible. This is not a rational set of strategies that a teacher could use. No, it is an orientation, a way of being, that has emerged out of 20 years of a teacher’s improvisational practice.

Discussion

We want to reimagine classroom discussions of reading as more than tools for unpacking a text. Building on a long history of conceiving the experience of reading as emergent, and as moving well beyond the text, we want to reimagine classroom discussions as processes of becoming, where the reader, text, and event are becoming through their relations to one another. Getting closer to an experience-like sensibility for discussions of reading is a difficult shift, requiring more than a tweaking of conventional classroom practices. Toward that end, improvisational theater, and the teaching of it, has the potential to help educators move toward different qualities of discussion practices with texts.

We are not conceiving improvisation as a metaphor for teaching. Instead, we see improv as a practice that cultivates a way of being that offers an alternative for what a teacher might be in relation to a student, a classroom, and the world. The improvisational practices and ethos that we animated in our three movements offer a way to think about pedagogy as an ongoing rehearsal of the uprooting of reality, the cultivation of comovements by groups of people toward emergence, surprise, wonder—toward magic.

In this section, we extend our juxtaposition of reading discussions and improv by imagining a teacher and students as improvisers participating in events of worlding as they encounter texts together. Reaching back to the three

movements, we reimagine the teacher as an improviser and consider how discussions of texts could be transformed through the following improv-inspired teaching practices: teaching as invoking the text, teaching as exchanging offers, teaching as attuning, teaching as following lines of flight, and teaching as activating embodied energy.

Teaching as Invoking (Not Owning) the Text

In an improvisational, emergent practice, the text is a point of departure. An opening text is also often a point of return. Yet, there are no guarantees. Entanglements with the text are vital because every reading is a new reading oriented by the movements that come before, situate the moment, and will come later. The improvisational teacher is as much a part of this entanglement as the students.

In worldings with the text, through the play of the ensemble, meanings and affects are infinitely multiplied. Present in the group are its members, of course, but also all sorts of possible characters who emerge: that guy sipping the Miller Lite in the hot tub in a cathedral and those two older women at the carnival riding bumper cars. So, we can describe the ensemble as the group members, but the power and vitality of the ensemble are in its multiplicative worlding of characters and their relationships. The text offerings are rich and heterogeneous, spread out as movements on a plane with other potential worldings.

For literacy scholars and teachers, a position of inviting rather than owning the text likely makes many nervous. Even though we may celebrate multiple or divergent readings of texts, we like to have a text ground to return to. To this convergence game of constant return to the text in practices of reading discussion, we introduce a different game: a divergence game. Here, the text is treated as nonsovereign (Breger, 2017) and engaged in an unstable, emergent ensemble. In this game, the ground of activity is only the ensemble and its ongoing play of energies. The ensemble uses or creates a first text to work with, a few steps forward to tell a story.

Teaching as Exchanging Offers

In improvisational worlding, talk moves forward by making offers, like gifts, rather than posing questions. Discussions of reading are often given to patterns of question and answer. In fact, much of the innovation around discussion has involved either disrupting teacher initiation-response-evaluation patterns and/or enriching the nature of teacher questions such that student responses will involve higher order thinking. Questions rise out from the text and fall back to it. Questions take the text apart or sometimes take the person who poses an answer apart.

We “yes, and...” this analytic disassembly of the text, and the many ways in which question/answer structures

classroom talk and power, with an alternative: leading discussion as an exchange of offers. Offers build something, going somewhere, right now. “Yes, and...” cannot happen without the first turn at talk being an offer and the response to it being another offer, gift following gift. Corey’s partner is bringing a hammer and a can opener into the scene. The improvisers take these up but then add (“yes, and...”); these are not just tools but rather precious objects that the character was supposed to inherit from his grandmother. The characters feel the use of the tools as a violation. Offer builds on offer. The teacher and the students are building something together—something uncertain, something collective. In the flow of this work, each must listen intently to the other so offer fits or attunes to offer. This kind of listening is cooperative, oriented toward cooperative construction. This is a radically different way to imagine the potential and the purpose of discussing texts in classrooms. These exchanges of offers, in which the teacher is both participant and facilitator, unfold as collective works that become worlds unto themselves. This improvisational exchange lives for a moment and serves as potentiality for the individual and collective movements alive in the classroom.

Teaching as Attuning

The reader is moved: A hint of thought, the shift of a posture, and the rise of intensity felt from the others in the scene offer a hint of the next move—only the next. An idea bubbles up. The improvisers lift their hands, stirring in a bowl. What are they stirring? Cookie dough. This they did not know, but a scene partner offers it up. Cookie dough emerges, and the kitchen takes shape. Nothing is clear but right now, this present right now, that next move. The improviser reads the scene partner’s offerings—utterances, gestures, movements, and sounds—and responds to these cues by contributing an offer. They attune to each other, they attune to the objects that they are bringing to life in the scene, they attune to the collectively built scene world, and they attune to each other’s characters and character histories, even as those histories are made in the process of becoming. As such, the improviser and the scene partner have no preconceived notion of preferred outcomes, and when they do, they attempt to honor an improvisational ethic by setting them aside to serve the practice of collective worlding. As Phil recalled in data movement 1, attunement meant sensing and then amplifying the feeling of fear provoked by the duplicitous, one-eyed talking lemon. His initial attunement to a whisper of nerves that grew slowly into terror, a developing feeling sensed and affirmed by his scene partner, sparked an entire scene world that neither could have predicted at the outset. There is no right way to create; an improv scene always becomes, by virtue of the form, what it is supposed to be. Hubba Bubba Gubba gum, innovative catheters, egg

white, spilled oil, and shoe goo—these moments will never happen in the same way for the same people again.

Discussion as attunement is not about being right, about argument, or about analysis in any direct way. Rather, such discussion is about being present, about presencing a world, and about feeling that presencing as it is coming to be. In teaching as attuning, teachers pay attention to energies and imaginations as much as anything else. The reader is at work, the author is at work, and the characters are at work—all of them making offerings. This particular occasion offers up its sensations: The room smells funny, the bell is going to ring, somebody’s stomach is growling, the classroom poster says “Proofread.” Still, there is an orientation. The author and text do not disappear; they are here, present, among others, along with the reader, as assemblages rise up and drop off. All of it is potentially full of a nearly infinite number of possible meanings. Leading a discussion as an event of attunement is about paying attention to the idiosyncratic energies in motion, attending to the singular entanglements between the emergent relations of classrooms and moving with them.

Teaching as Following Lines of Flight (Wandering)

The improvisational teacher may notice and follow lines of flight in the course of a reading discussion. Our three movements animated ways in which convergence and divergence are welcome in improvisation. Improvisers are rewarded when they follow a line of flight, such as the surprising meditation on the nature of patriarchy or a hot tub in a cathedral. In movement 2, Sam affirmed his scene partner’s unanticipated offer of “Your breasts?” and the two players embarked on a multisite journey that brought them from the carnival to the bumper car course, the kitchen and the bowling alley, exchanging offers as they shuttled along together, gathering other adventurers along the way. What rewards await a discussion group that, rather than saying what the teacher wants them to say, seeks after the divergent lines of flight that emerge when they world in relation to text?

When end-of-chapter or teacher-composed questions open discussions, teachers often struggle with the question of how to keep such discussions open to students and their lives. Instead, improvisational openers could do much more to engage students with worlding a text. Story swapping (movement 1) or building an improvisational scene, prompted by a title or a set of characters, could serve to create genuine openings with possibility for movement and flight, rather than openings with a predetermined closure.

Through lines of flight, the meanings and intentions of the discussion lean forward in time and are shared by the group, cascading forth through its unfolding energy.

The teacher strays off topic, and the students sit up. The author stumbles. The readers explore, making productive links, feeling the relations. Members of the ensemble watch for opening attunements and what they evoke, what worldings they stir up into existence. One builds the worldings and waits for others to add or waits for them to drop away. The readers dial up their own attention, light up all of their capacities to feel the heterogeneity on the plane before them: this day, these pages, these objects, these relations, the singularity of now. What comes together? Yes, and what else? Every coming together is the right one, for the next one—life in its growing complexity. The readers are together, always in the middle, along the lines: They do not stay in the lines but on the lines, feeling the lines and their reverberations. Feel the text becoming of the lines.

Teaching as Activating Embodied Energy

An improvisational approach to discussion asks the teacher to be a reader of the readers and a mover of them, an activator. In this teaching game, affect is not a bonus to pedagogy; it is the essential outcome of a pedagogy with/by energy. In movement 3, Sam senses the swell of energy that grows through his students' laughter upon the emergence of Hubba Bubba Gum gum. He attends closely to the rising arc of the story of the world-class tooth brusher that his class collectively composes into being, following its natural decrescendo. He claps his hands; the story settles into its conclusion. The teacher adopting an improvisational approach feels forward and back along the lines of intensity: Where is this moving? Where could it go? What could provoke movement? What attunements are being made? How can differences be provoked, along the lines that we are collectively exploring, to break repetitions? The teacher coaches from the side, from within: What if you heightened the emotion here? Experiment. What if that character you are taking up right now shifted to low status relative to the others?

Improvisers know that bodies are as important as ideas when offers are made during a scene. So too, the improvisational teacher might pay attention to bodies, not in the sense of scripted, classroom drama but in the ways that the teacher notices, animates, and interprets the energies being exchanged during a discussion of text—an event of worlding. Where are the students' bodies at this moment? What possibilities of the ensemble are activated by their physical relations to one another, and how could new possibilities be afforded or provoked? Indeed, the improvisational teacher would design pedagogy that would allow students to practice an affirmational exchange of energies. It might be as simple as imagining a ball of energy to share or as complex as designing different

physical routines and setups for different possible relations to worlding the text.

Toward Improvisational Pedagogy

An improvisational approach to reading discussion is less about specific strategies and more about ways of being together, an ethos. It takes seriously Rosenblatt's (1964) claim from over 50 years ago: The making of a text with a group is a singular experience, an occurrence. Our work is a movement toward a pedagogy of body and breath, of affective extension, of broadening the powers of the group. Whether or not we account for them, the affective energy that contextualizes discussions of reading and reading pedagogy is always already there. It just might be that teachers are pushing so hard, driving to forward rational agendas, that they are missing the magic that is already and always there between people and texts. Teachers with an improvisational ethos work on their practice to explore how they might expand their ability to accept, understand, and build off the text world that emerges in the encounter between the improviser and the improvised world in the next iteration, the next repetition. Improv is never finished; it is always about what happens next. It is alive. Facilitating such transactions has more to do with building a context and then understanding, conjuring, and managing shared affective intensities than it does with what a text is or how it ought to mean.

By embracing an improvisational ethos, teachers are attuning to the subjectivities of young people, who are entangling their personal narratives with the unfolding stories of an emerging world. Such processes are activated through desires and currents of energy, shimmering with atmospheric and bodily intensities and saturated with emotion that readers charge through narrative paths shuttling toward destinations unknown as they collectively compose a world into being. These discussions escape the intention of any single individual (author or reader) and arise from the idiosyncratic alchemy of artifacts, environments and atmospheres, refrains, and sensations, gathered together, ever emergent, indeterminate.

The improv class is over.

The improvisers are laughing and smiling, gathering their things. They prepare to leave a space that was familiar in its ability to produce something new. Were they changed by the worlds they made, the universes they entered? There is something that they cannot put their finger on, not quite, but they feel it: They were powerful, entangled for a moment, and now they leave the space with more than when they entered.

As Andy said earlier, there is something almost simple about improvisation: The participants give up their

agendas as they world together. They do not push; they do not drive. They just open their eyes and accept what is already there. Any pedagogy applied to such an approach to worlding would, for us, only seek to animate and facilitate that energy—that life emerging in its growing complexity.

NOTE

¹All first-person writing is intended to capture the voice of Sam (first author) in describing and reflecting on an improv rehearsal that he directed. We describe our choice to move between first and third person later in the article.

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