

Letting Something Else Happen: A Collaborative Encounter with the Work of Sharon Rosenberg

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In memory of Sharon Rosenberg

In July 2012, a two-day symposium was held at the University of Alberta (Edmonton, Alberta Canada), to celebrate and remember the life and work of Canadian feminist and cultural studies scholar, Dr. Sharon Michelle Rosenberg. Sharon was educated at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto and worked in the Sociology department at the University of Alberta from 2002 until her death in 2010. Her intellectual practice dealt with questions surrounding trauma, memory and remembrance, and the relationship between the living and the dead. Her scholarly work spanned the fields of cultural studies, queer theory, and feminist theory. Sharon was, from the early days of her dissertation work, interested in finding ways to disrupt the limited and limiting ethos of the university and the structures that shape academic knowledge creation and representation. In a 2010 essay in *The Future of Memory*, edited by Richard Crownshaw, Jane Kilby, and Antony Rowland, she explains: "I have been struggling to write, to create the space for these thoughts I find arduous to mark onto paper, for publication..." (2010 252-253). Near the end of her life Sharon was working with poet and writer Betsy Warland, intent to make

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more space for creative writing in her scholarly work (see Warland 2010 and www.betsywarland.com).

When we heard that the symposium was to be held, we both immediately knew that we wanted to participate and join with others in remembering Sharon. We were excited by the opportunity to meaningfully engage with Sharon's tremendous theoretical contributions; and we were particularly interested in the intentions stated by the symposium's organizers. Sharon's students (Heidi Bickis, Dr. Kate Bride, Dr. Amber Dean, Dr. Kara Granzow, Dr. Rebecca Lock, and Dr. Alissa Overend) and her partner Dr. Judy Davidson, also a professor at the University of Alberta, hoped to foster an event that would embody Sharon's desire to engage in precarious theorizing – in relation to writing and thinking, in relation to teaching and pedagogy, and in relation to living (on).

Rather than circulating a “call for papers,” the organizers produced a “call to conversation,” which explained the focus of the symposium: “The relations between people, ideas, affects were what held her animated interest. It is this critical and passionate conversation, interrupted by her death, which we invite you to attend to – in the wake of her absence – with careful, thoughtful, generous relationality.” The Precarious Theorizing program further explained the vision for the weekend: “sparked by Sharon's longstanding interest in and love for how ‘thought can move in a room, sometimes in unexpected ways’ ... We hope that you will be drawn to participate not only in the usual academic-conference mode ... but instead by ‘being in process’ – by offering your own ideas or even ‘half-finished thoughts’ to be taken up not just by the presenters but also by the room... Obviously this is an experiment...”

This article meditates on our experience at the symposium by looking closely at our contribution to the conversation – a performance entitled *Letting Something Else Happen*.¹ We hope to continue to engage “with careful, thoughtful, generous, relationality” around questions of vulnerability in the academic context. We think through these questions with our performance at the conference. We use the experience of our performance to think about the nature of our collaboration, risk-taking, and the possibility of intimacy in academic settings. After describing our performance at Precarious Theorizing, we turn first to a description

¹ Our title is inspired by Sharon's suggestion in her 2010 essay entitled “Facing Losses/Losing Guarantees” that the teacher and scholar ought to permit herself to be startled, to “feel the guarantees of what she thought she knew slip away, at least provisionally, *to let something else happen*, to allow in some other thought, to be open to what that facing does to the certainty of scholarship” (Rosenberg, 2010, 250, emphasis added).

of Sharon's work and its influence on our project, and then to a description of the work of performance artist Marina Abramović, whose approaches to performance, precarity, and vulnerability also informs our work. Through Sharon and Abramović, we return to the broader work of Precarious Theorizing in an attempt to make sense of the value of bringing vulnerability, risk-taking, and collaboration into our practice.

Letting Something Else Happen – A Description of Our Performance

In *Letting Something Else Happen*, we, dressed similarly in simple black shift dresses, stepped into a performance space marked out by classroom tables set in a square. We carried chairs with us and placed them on either side of a low table on which we had placed red roses. We sat. We focused our gaze on one another and we read a short passage from Judith Fryer Davidov (see below) on the ethical nature of encounter – first Roewan, then Michelle, then a third time, our voices in unison. We set our papers down and continued to look at each other, trying to be open and present to one another for six more minutes.² After six minutes, we turned our chairs toward empty chairs placed across from us, into which viewers had been instructed that they might sit. We sat with viewers for another six minutes. Spontaneously, additional participants joined the performance space and sat on the floor in pairs and groups. Others witnessed the performance from around the room, sitting at the surrounding tables.

In our initial proposal to contribute to the symposium, we did not have this particular performance in mind. In our proposal, we noted the parallels between our work and Sharon's – for instance, we noted that we were developing an intellectual practice that both draws on and focuses on some of the texts informing Sharon's work (i.e., Jill Bennett's *Empathic Vision*), and that we shared her commitment to knowledge production through creative practice. We suggested, moreover, that if precarious theorizing is about, to use the language of the call for participation, "grappling reflexively" with the ethics of scholarly writing as a mode of cultural production and memorialization, then we had something to offer to the symposium's conversation.

² Our performance was part of a panel that included two other presentations/provocations. We chose to sit with each other and with interlocutors for 6 minutes not because we felt that there was anything special about this time period, but because we wanted to stay within the time limits allotted to us.

Our Ongoing Collaboration: Precarious Encounters

[an encounter is] an exchange between self and other in which the voice of the other is heard, not a threat to be reduced or an object that I give myself to know in my capacity as knowing subject, but that which constitutes me as an ethical being.³

The first work we did together was a talk at a panel at CWSA, the Canadian Women's Studies Association, in Vancouver, BC, in May 2008. We were writing about the visual art of Rosalie Favell and we were interested in our distinct responses to and connections with Favell's work. Part of our work together involved writing our own descriptions of an individual image (Favell's *Paper Dolls*, 1999). We both spent time looking at this same image and were drawn to describe different things. In the paper presentation, we shifted our talk into a performance, reading our different descriptions at the same time to layer our voices. We wanted to give expression to the reality that even though we were looking together at the same image, our distinct locations and training meant that we saw differently. We wanted to proliferate the meanings that could be associated with this image; we hoped to upset the logics of interpretation that tell us that there is one way of seeing a work of art.⁴ In this performance, we stepped outside of the traditional conference presentation style in an attempt to find a form that might accurately represent our collaborative thinking in relation to Favell's work. By doing so, we added performance to our collaborative repertoire. Our performative move at the CWSA takes on deeper significance when read through Sharon's critique of the strictures and disciplinary practices of academe.

On Sharon Rosenberg's Work

As Sharon points out in her contribution to *The Future of Memory*, the university demands a particular kind of scholarly subject and performance – it is rational, accumulative, forward moving, and, importantly, invulnerable. Against these

³ Judith Fryer Davidov, *Women's Camera Work: Self/body/other in American Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 139.

⁴ See Crowe and Meagher, "Feelingful Encounters: Feminist Engagements with Rosalie Favell" *First Women and the Politics of Looking: Gender, Indigeneity, and Representation* edited by Wendy Gay Pearson, Kimberley J. Verwaayen, Ernie Blackmore, and Renee Beard, forthcoming.

demands, Sharon promotes scholarly encounters that startle. She urges readers to truly recognize knowledge as unstable, as faltering, and to be willing to lose our guarantees in the processes of asking questions. In other words, Sharon argues that scholars ought to be open to “encounter the limits of understanding, to attend to radical disruption, to allow ourselves perhaps to fall regularly, if only for limited time, into disorientation” (250). She encourages the scholar to “feel the guarantees of what she thought she knew slip away, at least provisionally, to *let something else happen*, to allow in some other thought, to be open to what that facing does to the certainty of scholarship” (250, emphasis added).

Sharon’s theorizing about the generative capacity of finding new ways to do scholarly work came out of her research in trauma studies. As a graduate student, she found herself working on the topic of the Montreal Massacre (1989), after Marc Lepine murdered fourteen women at École Polytechnique in Montreal, Quebec (see Rosenberg 1996, 1997, 1998, 2003, 2006). Sharon realized that her intellectual interest in understanding the memorialization of this event could not be parcelled off from her emotional and intimate experience of the event. She was, as were so many women, and in particular so many self-identified feminists, deeply shocked, threatened, and saddened by a mass murder that was both deliberate and explicit in its aim at feminists. Marc Lepine blamed feminism for his life circumstances and killed the women he killed because he associated them with feminism. The impact of the Montreal Massacre on Canadian feminism cannot be understated. Sharon felt this, but she also found that working in the emerging field of trauma studies on the question of the Montreal Massacre led her to remember her own experiences of childhood familial sexual abuse.

The Massacre, she writes, made it impossible to hold things apart: “my hold on this separateness began to shatter” (Rosenberg, 1997, 16). Studying and coming to understand the Montreal Massacre was work that alerted her to her own ignorance, to her ignored or “forgotten” experiences of incest. Her own memories opened up and emerged through in the process of her scholarly work. She says that she began to remember, and that her memories became material through the process of reflecting on the event of the massacre. Facing her own personal experiences of and self-protective responses to childhood trauma enriched her scholarly work and led Sharon to argue that trauma studies ought to include the *feeling* of trauma in its analysis. Such a move, she insists, would enable the field to upend some of the habits of scholarship and knowledge production.

Trauma studies, like so many potentially innovative fields of examination, is, as Sharon argues, delimited by “the ‘prohibitions’ of the late modern academy” (2010, 252). Though she draws on a long standing critique of the modern university as a place increasingly driven by neoliberal logics of accumulation, her specific concern is with the ways that knowledge valued by the contemporary university depends on privatising our emotional entanglements with and responses to our objects of study (see 2010, 248). To move beyond the certainty of scholarship, she tells us, to challenge knowledge through unsettlement is, and indeed must be, part of the project of trauma studies – it should not be hidden, swept away, done in private, or covered in glib jokes (her glib joke, she recalls was: “it took me a year to recover from reading *Testimony*” [2010, 246]).

The field, Sharon insists, would be better if it made space for the undoing, the disorientation, the disruption, the un-understability of its object of study. Unsettlement, she says, has remained privatized (2010, 248). More specifically, trauma studies has been limited, she tells us, by similar rational patterns of analysis and interpretation.⁵ As Sharon has taught us, both trauma studies and art criticism are limited in their capacity to be transformative when scholars and practitioners refuse, for any number of reasons, the experience of feeling.

Sharon was also concerned that feelings and personal experiences in the classroom are often actively ignored by professors and students, both constrained by the disciplinary knowledge regimes that shape scholarly practices. Sharon points out that this has restricted scholarship, particularly in the context of trauma studies. She posits that trauma studies has the capacity to undo all we know, perhaps even what it is to be human, but if we turn away from the undoing then the field is just a shell of what it could be. Perhaps it is not the field of trauma studies that has the potential to undo, but rather the collective insistence and rigour that is required to work with feelings and personal experiences in relation to traumatic events.

In her dissertation and in other writing, Sharon brought literary styles of expression into relationship with conventional forms of scholarly writing. In her doctoral dissertation, she experiments with methods of self-articulation that

⁵ In our broader collaborative research projects, we extend Sharon’s observations to the study of art and observe that the art critic is so often compelled to respond to difficult work by bringing certainty to it. Critics are habituated to thinking around works of art that they experience as “difficult” (i.e., attending to the nature of its controversies) rather than with them. See Jennifer Doyle (2013) *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, Duke University Press.

work to expand the field of trauma studies. Bursts of emotion, self-reflection, and insistent questioning of her own process are at the foundation of her writing. For example, she often inserted smaller font as a strategy for making certain feelings such as hesitation, uncertainty, unknowing, and faltering known in the text. This strategy textually embodies a refusal to exile feelings from the text. This was work that Roewan discovered while doing graduate studies at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Through her dissertation writing about artists who represented experiences of childhood sexualized trauma in their writing and art, Roewan met Sharon Rosenberg. Roewan found her dissertation when she was looking at dissertations in the library, trying to find examples of other doctoral students who had dared to tamper with standard academic form, and other scholars that dared to theorize from their own experiences of violence. She shared with Sharon the experience of childhood sexual trauma, and the desire to claim experiential knowledge as essential to writing about trauma. They also shared the drive to creatively disrupt the form of traditional scholarly writing, in efforts to more fully represent experiences of trauma. The encounter with Sharon's work encouraged Roewan to claim her own experience of trauma and to more fully accept and acknowledge the productive intellectual contributions that lived experiences of violence make to scholarship. Walking on this treacherous path with Sharon supported her to risk bringing her own experiences of trauma into the fields of trauma, psychology, and women's and gender studies.

Sharon's experimentations in writing and her commitments to creativity, precarity, representing experiences of trauma, and risk-taking emboldened us to take seriously the symposium's call to be "in process" rather than to present in a way that claims a certainty of knowledge. The stage was set by the symposium, itself inspired by Sharon's commitments.

The Artist is Present

The structure of our performance was based on performance artist Marina Abramović's recent durational work at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. In *The Artist is Present*, Marina Abramović performed a 736-hour, 30-minute silent piece spanning from March 14 to May 31, 2010. Every day that MoMA was open she would sit in the Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium from the time the museum was open until it was closed. At the end of the day she would make a mark on the wall to record the day of perfor-

mance. Spectators were invited to take turns sitting across from her. They were asked to remain silent. The performance space, square in shape, was marked by white tape. The space was dramatically lit, with huge lights pointed toward Marina and the visitor, giving the space an incredible brightness, not unlike being on a Hollywood movie set. Spectators sat and stood around the marked off space.

Known by some as the grandmother of performance art, Marina Abramović is a New York-based, Serbian artist born in 1946 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Her performance practice has spanned over forty years. *The Artist is Present* was the longest duration of any solo performance by Abramović. Roewan participated in the performance, first waiting in line to sit with Marina and then, on May 7th, sitting with her for two minutes. Roewan's time was ended by the closing of the gallery for the evening.

The act of waiting in line with others in order to sit with Marina was part of the *The Artist is Present* performance, calling spectators to also perform as part of the work by both sitting and waiting. While Roewan waited in line for two full days, she contemplated Abramović's practice and the work in the retrospective. Most vividly present for her during this time was the relationship between two performances: *The Artist is Present* and *Rhythm 0*. *Rhythm 0*, a six hour durational piece, last in a cycle of the Rhythms series exploring the conscious and unconscious body, was performed at Studio Morra in Naples in 1974. Archival materials were presented at the Abramović retrospective and descriptions and images are included in the catalog produced by MoMA. Abramović sets powerful and simple rules for her performance in *Rhythm 0*. She remains passive and compliant while audience members can do whatever they want to her using these carefully chosen objects that she has placed on the table: gun, bullet, blue paint, comb, bell, whip, lipstick, pocket knife, fork, perfume, spoon, cotton, flowers, matches, rose, candle, water, scarf, mirror, drinking glass, polaroid camera, feathers, chains, needle, safety pin, hairpin, brush, bandage, red paint, white paint, scissors, pen, book, hat, handkerchief, sheet of white paper, kitchen knife, hammer, saw, piece of wood, ax, stick, bone of lamb, newspaper, bread, wine, honey, salt, sugar, soap, cake, metal pipe, scalpel, metal spear, box of razor blades, dish, fruit, band Aid, alcohol, medal, coat, shoes, chair, leather strings, yarn, wire, sulphur, grapes, olive oil, rosemary branch, and apple.

There are endless possibilities for the use of these objects. These objects can cause pleasure; used with aggression against a body they can inflict pain. Some objects could do grave harm to Abramović, or cause death. In *Rhythm 0*,

Abramović also becomes the object. When Roewan viewed these objects displayed on the table, many of which had come to represent instruments of abuse and torture and had been used against Abramović, she felt mildly nauseous. It was both a visceral and surreal experience to look at the objects that people had used to harm Abramović. They became evidence of the willingness of an audience to engage in harmful acts against the artist. This reality of the ways in which violence and harmful actions can emerge through performance stood in sharp contrast to the celebratory feel of this major retrospective.

On her second day of waiting in line, Roewan's experience was intensified. Having participated in the act of waiting for Abramović the day before, she was now even more invested in sitting with her. Also, there were other people in line whom she had met and talked with the day before; a new community had formed around the performance. Roewan's desire to be part of the experience of sitting across from Abramović, an artist she respected and who had influenced her own thinking, teaching, and artistic practice, was heightened.

Michelle also participated in this performance experience. When she was at MoMA, Roewan posted a status update on her facebook page that prompted Michelle to turn to MoMA's live feed of *The Artist Is Present*. Michelle watched for most of the afternoon, admittedly for the novelty of watching Roewan, so far away, and in such famous company. However, it didn't take long for Michelle to get pulled more deeply into the event. She watched several men and women take their spot in front of Marina. Despite the limited point of view and the less than perfect reception, she was riveted by the solemnity, the seriousness, the intensity of Marina, of the sitters, and of the gallery goers who watched the quiet spectacle. She wondered what it would feel like to have waited all day, or overnight, or for days, to simply to sit, quietly, and most importantly, intensely with someone such as Abramović. Michelle wondered at the rush of her everyday life, of the push to get out of the house, to work through the day, to get dinner on the table, and her child to bed. How often, she wondered, are we with one another?

These two experiences, one immediate, one mediated and distant, created a shared connection between us that became rich with possibility.

In our conversations over the months and years that followed these experiences, we came to appreciate that *The Artist is Present* becomes particularly significant when read in relation to *Rhythym O*. Moreover, we felt that the connections between these two works are particularly stark and generative when read with Sharon's work on trauma and vulnerability. Both explore the vulnerability of the body in relation to others. *The Artist is Present* can be seen to be a reparative per-

formance when read in relation to the trauma inflicted on Abramović by those in attendance at *Rhythm 0*. In consideration of this possible reading, together we developed connections to Sharon's work and began to explore what the act of feeling vulnerable in the context of life and scholarly engagement might generate.

Precariousness as Vulnerability

In her contribution to recent feminist exploration of vulnerability, Ann Murphy asserts that "the relationship between self and other is characterized by reciprocal exposure and vulnerability" (2011, 575). She draws on the work of Judith Butler to imagine the implications of a bodily ontology that is grounded in a recognition of human vulnerability. How would our relationships be transformed if we admitted our vulnerability to others? This is a question that can be productively raised in relation to the performance work of Marina Abramović. In *Rhythm 0*, for instance, she materializes her vulnerability to her audience. This takes on a different form in *The Artist is Present*, in which the physical vulnerability of *Rhythm 0* is translated into an emotional, affectual, or existential openness to the other. The openness performed in *The Artist is Present* is predicated on an explicit recognition of the (unknown) other.

For Sharon, embracing an ethic of vulnerability within trauma scholarship meant that she would be free to reflect and write about her unsettling relationship with acts of memorialization as well as with the actual dead who are memorialized. She points out that our interpersonal relationships, and our scholarly projects, might be transformed if we stripped our lingering commitments to invulnerability, mastery, and expertise. In her published work, Sharon developed strategies for expressing her vulnerability, her doubts, and her feelings of unsettlement. She writes additionally about the classroom as a site where vulnerability can either be nourished or shut out. To nourish vulnerability in the classroom or in the similar performance setting of the academic conference, one ought to be open to unpredictability and unknowing. It is this commitment to precarious scholarly engagements that fuelled the structure of the symposium that memorialized Sharon and her work.

Inspired both by Sharon's commitment to find ways to bring vulnerability, unsettlement, and unpredictability to the classroom, conference, and academy more generally, our performance explores vulnerability as a condition of being present to the other and being open to the unexpected or unanticipated encoun-

ter with the other.

Our preparations for our performance at Precarious Theorizing were animated by the connections we began to make between Sharon's work, Abramović's performances, and our thinking about trauma, vulnerability, and practices of reparation. Could our sitting in silence at the symposium honouring Sharon be a reparative practice? Could it create space for acknowledging our losses? Could it create space for acknowledging the possibilities created by stepping outside of standard academic practices? What role can performance play? How can performance broaden our knowledge? We understood our performance to be risky, we felt vulnerable to each other and to the other participants in the weekend symposium.⁶ Drawing on our ongoing interest in disrupting static interpretation, we do not offer one explanation or interpretation, but instead intend to generate a proliferation of meanings about the performance.

Like Abramović and her interlocutors, we sat across from one another, a table between us. Against the impulse to explain, to justify, or to frame our performance, we offered no introduction or interpretation. We simply performed and then invited spectators to become participants by sitting with us or with one another.

It was through our performance that we were able to begin to articulate the contours of our vulnerability. We felt vulnerable because we did not know what would happen. The idea of a new, fifteen minute performance, which is mostly silent, pushed against prescribed scholarly practices and habits. Here our felt vulnerability resonated with Sharon's observation that unpredictability, especially unpredictability in the classroom, is not something to be avoided, but rather embraced and explored. Sharon insists that there is much to be gained from making universities, classrooms, and conferences "places where the bodies of

⁶ We also felt buoyed by the spirit of the symposium, which encouraged intervention. We were not the only participants – or "sparkers," to use the language of the symposium's call for participation – to experiment with forms of expression. The session scheduled after us featured two of Sharon's students – graduate students she had been able to follow through to graduation and the procuring of academic positions. They elected to share with the group what they knew to be the very special relationship that Sharon fostered in them, the community of learners that was important to her, and the very big questions that she was willing to ask, in generative and generous ways, of her students. In sharing with the group their experience of her teaching, Amber Dean and Kara Granzow read – in fact, performed – the transcript of a conversation they'd had years earlier, about the dissertations and scholarly projects. Amber and Kara read their own parts and they asked Betsy to read the part of Sharon.

teachers (and students) are allowed in (welcomed?) as complicated, messy, and tenuous performances” (2004, 92). Elsewhere, Sharon reflects on not knowing as an important part of the process of teaching (see Rosenberg 2010).

We also identified interpretation as a source of vulnerability since we did not know how our performance would be interpreted. This vulnerability is linked to our own ongoing questions about interpretation. In our collaborative work, we have been resistant to and critical of the way that art critical and art historical interpretive practices are used to master and pin down a work of art (see Crowe and Meagher, forthcoming, and 2012). In the days leading up to our performance at the symposium, we discussed providing an introduction to our performance that would draw links between the performance and *The Artist is Present*, or that would describe our collaboration and our collaborative work. We decided, ultimately, to resist framing the work in a way that would explain our performance or suggest a particular interpretation. This for us was a gesture of vulnerability. It was also a gesture of trust. We trusted that the performance would be readable, that it would “make something happen.” We trusted that our audience-cum-collaborators would be able to make something happen with us.

These feelings of trust did not mean that we overcame our feelings of vulnerability. Indeed, our vulnerabilities were intensified by our experience during the performance. In the silence of the performance, through the act of being present to one another, we encountered our bodies. Through silence and stillness, our awareness of our bodies was heightened. We took deep breaths and could sense our focused presence occupying the space of the room. In this silence, while waiting for others to join us, we felt our vulnerabilities amplified. Would others join us; would they sit with our silence?

We felt in and through these acknowledged vulnerabilities that we were coming to a deepened understanding, or a different understanding, of our collaboration, of collaboration-in-process. Vulnerability, not knowing, and unpredictability have figured in our ongoing collaboration – a collaboration that we’ve described, using Sharon’s language, as “precarious”. Writing on scholarly collaboration, Kathleen McConnell reflects on the intimacies of this kind of work. Collaboration, she writes, produces a “kind of intimacy in so far as it renders us witness to someone else’s anxieties and travails – all of the messiness and uncertainty that is no longer visible in published pieces” (20). To be a good witness to someone’s anxieties and travails requires welcoming their vulnerabilities with your own, it thrives on being present to your own investments, desires, fears, unsettlements, and, in a word, vulnerabilities. Sharon experimented with writing

styles that would render visible the “messiness and uncertainty” of her scholarly encounters. Inspired by Abramović, we experimented with performance as a way to render visible and make present the vulnerabilities that attend our precarious, intimate collaboration within an academic setting.

Vulnerability, Risk-taking and Collaboration

Being vulnerable in relation to the production and presentation of scholarly work is something that Sharon explored – she worked to articulate the complexities of trauma, and in doing so she chose to embrace vulnerability. This meant that, especially in her work in trauma studies, she decided to stand *with* the pain of others, rather than working to be invulnerable to the feelings of others. This commitment was not without risk. Indeed, Sharon engaged in deeply risky work – work that challenged the practices of her field, disturbed the habits of scholarly labour, and compelled her to reckon with traumatic experiences that had been secreted away.

By risk-taking through our own performance at the conference, we began to recognize the depth of the intellectual, professional, and personal risks she took in working in precarious ways. Sharon bravely and fiercely used herself and her own embodied memories and experiences to expand the contours of trauma studies. Inspired by her intellectually generous and generative spirit, *Letting Something Else Happen* is a performance that gives expression to the intimacy of collaborative practice, and gives presence to the vulnerability and sense of risk that comes with collaboration.

In the way that *The Artist is Present* can be productively read as reparative in relation to Marina Abramović’s earlier work, *Rhythm 0*, our performance may be read as a reparative intervention into the scholarly context that prohibits the expression of vulnerability and pain. Occupying the space of precarity encouraged by Sharon’s work and the conference organizers, we believe that we helped to make space for vulnerability and risk-taking.

In the group discussion that followed our performance Dr. Kip Pegley, a musicologist at Queen’s University, described an experiential sound exercise that she teaches to her music students. Kip was encouraged to lead us in the exercise, but the group declined. After more discussion, as the conference was coming to the end, Judy Davidson suggested again that Kip lead us in the sound exercise. Kip agreed. She turned off the lights and we all moved from our chairs to the centre of the space – the space that had slowly transformed from an empty

space between us to an embodied and engaged space of listening and being together. We lay on the floor, in the darkened room, and listened to Kip lead us in a relaxation meditation. Then she encouraged us to make noise. At first there were murmurs, mumbles, and humming. Then a birdcall, a belly laugh, and a whistle. We chortled and laughed, we laughed at one another, we laughed at and through our discomforts, at the silliness of us all, scholars lying in the dark together. Together. We made noise – not quite music, a cacophony – but we risked participation in sound-making. In all our various levels of connection, with each other, with Sharon, with Sharon’s work, with Sharon’s life, we confronted the limitations of the institutional setting and inside ourselves, an act of resistance against the scholarly confines that dictate the experiences and knowledge that we might create. It is our feeling that through our mutual risk-taking something else did happen.

In Conclusion, Precariously

Sharon Rosenberg’s articulation of precarious theorizing was crafted around her insistence that scholarly enterprises are enriched – not limited - when we refuse to close ourselves off from our uncertainties, unsettlements, and sense of not-knowing. “Precarious theorizing,” as her students put it in their call to conversation, “... involves ceaselessly grappling reflexively with the ethics of the production of such academic traces and attending to those very practices.” It is a theory that is, they continue, underpinned by a “radical relationality.” Our practice – our performance – was an act of radical relationality, and the symposium organized by scholars, colleagues, students, and friends who wanted to remember Sharon was also underpinned by radical relationality. This radical relationality matters for the work of scholars and cultural producers who are, so often, in instrumental and increasingly rational and corporate settings, set in opposition and competition with one another. Practicing precarity in our teaching, our research, our research creation, and our relationships with one another nourishes connections and collaborations that, as Rosenberg’s work on trauma and traumatic ignorances indicate, have the capacity to expand and enrich our fields of study. It enables us to ask questions that make researchers uneasy, and to ask questions about the often unrecognized role that our complex, messy affective encumbrances, entwinements with both our remembered (and indeed, forgotten) pasts and imagined futures play in the knowledge we produce.

For our own collaboration, this means that we move forward with a recognition that in working together, we are intimately engaged with one another, and that this intimacy is nourishing and productive for our work since it is founded in vulnerability, precarity, and feelings associated with risk-taking. In the broader sense, the radical relationality practiced at the symposium in July 2012 provides a glimpse of what can possibly happen when scholars embrace the feelings that we are so often encouraged to conceal. The sort of precarious theorizing imagined and practiced by Sharon Rosenberg is, we believe, enhanced by engaging in creative processes in which we trust our feelings. Creative scholarship that acknowledges the contribution played by feelings in the production of knowledge is a form of work that can, as Sharon has showed us, move us beyond the habits of the academy. It can transform the relationships we have with the objects and processes that we investigate. It can transform the relationships that we have with our students and our colleagues. Such transformations in relationship, transformations that lead toward radical relationality, were and are fundamental to Sharon, whose words we end with:

“I am suggesting we might find generative possibilities, for more livable lives, in creating scholarship (and hence public conversations) that encounters ignorance(s), gives over to thought what we do not readily have to give, gets lost in facing what is difficult to bear, and allows openings to be undone by traumatic encounter. At stake is vulnerability, yes. But can we afford to orient otherwise?” (2010, 260).

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