

Reflections on the U.S. Social Forum
Detroit 2010, The Foundry Delegation
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What a privilege to be invited by Melanie Joseph and the Foundry Theater to attend the 2010 U.S. Social Forum in Detroit. Melanie and I had made a new show out of Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl* and the Foundry presented it in the spring of 2004. Having hung around the Foundry since 2000, I was constantly rung awake by not only development and production activity, but also by the incredible social dialogues the Foundry initiated, engaging artists from all walks to interface with the progressive political world beyond their own work.

Something about applying creativity, about activating think-outside-the-box methodologies onto the complexities of the world and global problems...with the hopes that such energies could reverberate through the Foundry commissions, on top of the most original aesthetics, the thought provocation, the poetic experiential, all coursing through compassion...beyond ego, facing truths, activating impossibilities, that is the manna of Melanie Joseph's mind.

And so the Foundry delegation trekked to Detroit, to live out a core principle of the Foundry manifesto.

The thing about Detroit—its natives love their city. Do or die, they are loyal to the end. From the concierge to the corner grocer to the steadfast student to the artisan baker to the crack head squatting: 'Welcome to Detroit.'

To visit Detroit is to understand how capitalism abandoned this once flourishing center. One wonders about this hard bill of industry, to milk the resources dry while assuming natural sustainability, when in fact as the tide turns, as profit addiction remains rigid and turns towards the suburbs and then ultimately elsewhere, yes abandonment is the number one bad fucking habit of capitalism.

A Marxist economist showed Lucy Thurber and I around the city. There was a corner office that I will never forget—abandoned when the auto industry left town—no one even bothered to deal with the files, repurpose the furniture, clear the space. It was frozen in time, a fossil from 60 years ago. Also, a heartbreak to pass an empty public park, the grass growing high as an elephant's eye, dry and parched, the monkey bars rusted completely anti-social. But then within a neighborhood of abandoned houses, artist spirit is present, refuses to let the once-precious go to waste, reinstates value in the care and attention of hand-made dolls and crafts flooding a shell of a home with vibrant colors, with unrelenting optimism, with a line around the block with viewers who want to see.

You could buy a house for \$500 if you wanted. Revive it with value. A wealth of Social Forum panels, seminars, action committees, fevered with possibilities. A huge

discussion of green economies, ingenious resourcefulness. For instance, technology that would harness winter cold into natural refrigeration. Plans of how to rebuild Detroit completely green. O if there were only enlightened capitalists that could invest not in getting Detroit back to how it was, but carry it forward into how it could be the environmental prototype, a model for our future and its dire ecologies.

The Marxist economist also showed Lucy Thurber and I the former glory that was the Packard plant. It surely looked like a war zone, with mountainous piles of debris, mangled metal, auto carcasses. I remember Lucy Thurber, the author of a cycle of plays that documents, articulates the abandonment and disenfranchisement of the mill towns in Western Massachusetts where she grew up, Lucy Thurber climbing up a three-story high pile of rotted rubber and metallic waste, lifting her fist up to the sky yelling: 'It's not our fault! It's not our fault.' The awful abandonment by capitalism is systemic, is universal, is particular for our shortsighted modern American brand of economy—O and how it drains the human citizens, kills from the inside. But. Something lifted in Lucy Thurber and I witnessed it as she transcended the rubble and fitfully made her declaration.

Maureen Taylor, the humanist/activist reminded at a Welfare Rights session: Detroit is in big trouble, but I can tell you: if we ain't able to fix a mess like this here, a theater like this is coming to a place near you.

And now that we are post-11/9, as our country is being dismantled right before our eyes, the U.S. Forum and what the Foundry has been agitating for in this age of artists is crucial, now more than ever.