

Some reflections from Ain Gordon

### US SOCIAL FORUM or Ancillary Resonance Takes Center Stage

1. "Come to the US Social Forum." As a theater artist it's rare to be invited by an arts organization to think beyond my theater head – such invites are usually meant as research to be directly/literally harvested for performance. But Melanie said "just come..."
2. She said "just come" to a crew of theater artists united, really, by her interest (rather than generational/aesthetic unity, etc). If you're lucky enough to mature/age into some kind of "career," you age into some kind of isolation. You see who you work with. Yes, your peers may gather for panel discussions (etc) but always with an audience (often with a producer) which may prompt your performed disbursing-knowledge-self rather than your witness-absorbing-self. But Melanie gathered us with no audience - "just come..."
3. She said "just come" to Detroit. This was 2010. Detroit was just starting toward the cultural/social expansion we now casually reference. Miles of the city were abandoned but whole blocks were also taken over for communal living experiments. Some public parks fenced off because the city could not afford maintenance; but citizens jumped those fences to turn that abandoned land into urban farms. Detroit offered a vision of American abundance, waste, innovation, deprivation and re-revolution. I believe the artist all agreed this was among the most theatrical things we'd ever seen.

SO...while we absorbed the ideologies being debated in the US Social Forum we found ourselves unexpectedly obsessing over the revolutionary landscape outside the convention doors. We organized a tour through the vast, silent, wreckage of shuttered auto factories (cities in themselves). We found, out there, manifest, the physical history of all the inequities thinkers inside the social forum were striving to alter.

And we found each other. Without an audience (or a script we were nursing – or a producer for whose attention we might jockey – Melanie was diligently egalitarian) we found passionate interest in each other's rigor (often apart from aesthetic overlap). We bonded with each other's perception of this immersive journey into America's conjoined shames and triumphs.

I'm not sure that's what Melanie intended when she said "just come..." but she made it possible.

Ain Gordon  
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