CRACK OF DAWN

A DURATIONAL PERFORMANCE BY GREG WOHEAD

In January 2009, on a freezing snowy day in rural Illinois, my then-partner, Hetty, and I—two atheist liberals—went to the home of Samuel and Martha Herschberger, an Amish couple not much older than us who had 7 children. We spent the afternoon in an often awkward exchange with Samuel and Martha, finding out about each other's lives; we told them about our small Victorian flat in London, about my partner's vegetarian diet, about how and why we value art. They told us about their family, church meetings and the work they do in the fields.

***Crack of Dawn* is a day-long improvised durational performance that takes our exchange with Samuel and Martha as its source and loops it in a retelling best summed up as a live art Amish 'Groundhog Day'.** Through an almost musical progression of repetitions—as well as meditations on the lyrics of Cyndi Lauper's *Time After Time* and out-of-context scenes from the Harrison Ford film *Witness*—we turn one afternoon into a strange, kaleidoscopic examination of the possibility or impossibility of ever really understanding each other.

"Wohead's sensitive exploration of the way we grasp at understanding and seeing each other truthfully are realised through… a disarming approach to form"
The Stage on *Call It a Day*, companion piece to *Crack of Dawn*

***Crack of Dawn* can take place in a theatre, gallery or rehearsal studio where the audience come and go as they please.** Upon entering the space, audience members see a large table in the centre of the room with myself and three other performers sitting around it. There's a table of snacks to one side and a wall of cards to another containing prompts which the performers draw and respond to throughout the performance.

The other performers and I enact the idea of the original conversation, each person taking a turn narrating as 'Greg' from 2009. With each looped retelling, each new 'Greg' takes different liberties as they alter the story, sometimes subtly, sometimes wildly. Through these improvised repositionings, we lean into a sense of the queer, the weird, the plural—we see different points of view and layerings of gender, race and background. Each performer in turn takes the idea of that conversation and makes it their own, unravelling it and making it bigger, stranger and deeper than the reality of the original conversation.

As the day carries on, the performers work their way through, becoming increasingly exhausted, drawing longform connections, letting their guard down and exploring ideas of understanding and misunderstanding, connection and disconnection and familiarity and strangeness. Through the structure of the idea of this conversation, the performers gradually reveal themselves and through that they connect with each other and the audience.

"In Wohead's work, making theatre is an attempt to bring people and ideas to life. In a generous, calm performance, Call It a Day demonstrates how hard true understanding – of both oneself and of another – is to achieve."
Exeunt on *Call It a Day*

At the heart of the performance is a question about whether it's ever really possible to understand another person. While at times in the piece this might be a political question—what is it like for an American man and a British woman to try to understand an Amish man and woman, and vice versa—the emotional thread that emerges has to do with the couples between themselves. What at first seems like a show about people from different cultures trying to understand one another also becomes about the tiny culture that can be formed by two people in a relationship and what happens when that tiny culture is no longer shared.

What does it feel like to find familiarity in a stranger, and what does it feel like when someone who used to be so familiar becomes a stranger themselves?

***Crack of Dawn* is co-performed with a composer and sound designer (Ben Babbitt or Maxwell Sterling)**, who provides a live responsive soundtrack to the piece; a meditative tonal pathway drawing on post-rock styles, inverting and refracting Cyndi Lauper's *Time After Time* (at times provoking the performers with karaoke moments), essentially acting as a guiding force and provocateur.

Basic Technical Requirements

SPACE

- Theatre, gallery or rehearsal studio

LIGHTING, SOUND, PROJECTION

- Lighting basic cover (can be on stands if in a space without a lighting rig)
- PA
- More specific information can be provided

PERSONNEL

- 6 on the road: 4 performers, one sound designer, one technical manager
- Provided by venue: technician to assist with get in and get out

Age recommendation

- 14+

RUNNING TIME

- sunrise to sunset

Call It a Day, a companion evening-length theatre piece to *Crack of Dawn* using the same performers, can be programmed in tandem with *Crack of Dawn* or on its own. *Call It a Day* is a part-written, part-improvised 85-minute incarnation of the conversation with Samuel and Martha Herschberger. This performance takes place in theatre spaces. More information is available on request.

Crack of Dawn is co-commissioned by Theatre in the Mill, South Street, University of Reading, Chapter and The Yard with additional support from Shoreditch Town Hall. The development was supported by a residency program with Los Angeles Performance Practice at CAP UCLA, mala voadora's Dois por Dois residency program supported by Inresidenceporto and the Peggy Ramsay Foundation. Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

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Concept and performance	**Greg Wohead**
Originally realised & performed with	**Tim Bromage, Mireya Lucio, Amelia Stubberfield**
Composing and sound design	**Maxwell Sterling and Ben Babbitt**
Scene Design Consultant	**Shannon Scrofano**
Production Manager	**Helen Mugridge**
Dramaturgy	**Season Butler**
Producer	**Laura Sweeney**
Photography	**Paul Blakemore and Gema Galiana**

Casting: Touring performances will be cast from a pool of performers based in London and Los Angeles including Season Butler, Amelia Stubberfield, Tim Bromage, Vera Chok, Mireya Lucio, Jesse Saler, Jessica Hanna and others.

Workshops are available in conjunction with *Crack of Dawn* on methods of re-enactment, autobiographical performance and collaborative performance making. Workshops can also be tailored to specific needs. Please get in contact to discuss further.

Greg is happy to take part in Q&As or round table discussions on topics such as autobiographical performance, re-enactment and artistic process, all of which are relevant to the research and practice behind *Crack of Dawn*.

Greg Wohead is a writer, performer and live artist originally from Texas. He makes theatre performances, one-to-one pieces and audio works. He draws on a range of references and forms including autobiography, found audio, film, historical reenactment and fan fiction. Recent touring work includes *Celebration, Florida*, *Comeback Special*, *The Ted Bundy Project* and *Story #1* (in collaboration with Rachel Mars). His work has been seen at theatres and festivals in the UK, US and Europe including Battersea Arts Centre, Brighton Festival, Forest Fringe, Bristol Old Vic, Mayfest, Northern Stage, Bios (Athens), LAX Festival (Los Angeles), Fusebox Festival (Austin), ArtPower (San Diego), mala voadora (Porto) and English Theatre Berlin. Commissions and residencies include Orchard Project, MAKE, Vooruit, Contact Flying Solo International Commission, Choreodrome by The Place, Dois por Dois Residency by mala voadora, Experimentica, Theatre in the Mill, South Street, Bristol Ferment and Dance and the Homemade by Chisenhale Dance Space. He's an Associate Artist at The Yard and Shoreditch Town Hall in London.

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