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My Barbarian at the ICA: Grappling with Politics, Theater, and Art

by Christina Gesualdi

"Indistinction," Alex Segade of My Barbarian explains, "is when something is neither this nor that."

The workshop for [Post-Living Ante-Action Theater \(POLAAT\)](#) led by interdisciplinary performance collective My Barbarian was neither a corporate team building retreat nor an immersive Butoh intensive. It was neither a dinner theater rehearsal for The Music Man nor a beginners' improvisation class. It was neither a crunchy embodied yoga class nor a guided meditation session. It was neither an Occupy meeting nor an academic lecture on politics or art.

As I watched the rehearsal/workshop at the Rotunda on Friday, the group's practice hovered just above all of these familiar references but never quite landed. The participants--Penn students and staff of The Institute of Contemporary Art--trusted the My Barbarian leaders Segade and Malik Gaines to wildly lead them into the unknown. For six full hours the group prepared for an interactive performance that will occur at the ICA on Sunday afternoon. They took their shoes off, practiced trust falling and yes, believe it, they even attempted levitation. They chanted mantras and struggled to sing them in a round. They giggled often, embracing the awkwardness and absurdity of it all, and sometimes they even took a pizza break.

At their most serious, they devised group skits sourcing from local newspaper clippings about the confusing voter I.D. laws or Romney and Obama. At their most playful, they simultaneously pantomimed a play-by-play of a "utopian day". One guy skipped around the room in figure eights, while another played air guitar. Many slept strangely on their backs (I later learned they were tanning, resting in a futuristic sleeping machine, or traveling to the bar in a teleporter), while others agreed upon an invisible club where they could get their collective groove on, silently bumping, grinding, and doing the running man.

What a blast! The group has one more day of rehearsal to play with wacky costumes and props (visit the [My Barbarian website](#) to get a sense of the strange yet good-looking outrageousness their performances exude). By Sunday they will be ready for you. Go see this free show and become enveloped into the POLAAT experience.

Post-Living Ante-Action Theater (POLAAT), My Barbarian, Institute of Contemporary Art
Sunday, October 28th, 2PM, <http://www.icaphila.org/>

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