Place, Dis-Place, Re-Place
Mary Anderson, Theater and Dance, Associate Professor

Mary Elizabeth Anderson is an Associate Professor in the Maggie Allesee Department of Theatre and Dance. Her research and creative activity engages questions about the human relationship to place.

The site-responsive work I create with students in Detroit is framed within the theoretical and aesthetic cultures of social practice. Yet, until recently, I had not fully considered the extent to which my work relies upon a set of presuppositions about the relationship between artists and participants which are at least partially informed by anthropology. In this presentation, I will examine various dimensions of the development of a performance created with students at Belle Isle. The performance was designed to explore familiar aspects of the history of the island park, while also endeavoring to to unearth submerged complications in that history. Using Hal Foster’s essay “The Artist as Ethnographer” as a critical template through which I might interrogate my own practice, I will discuss various steps of our creative process as a set of convolutions. We reach towards ideas and images that attract us and subsequently turn them over, turn them around, twist them sideways and backwards in order to better understand not only the ideas, images and histories but also the nature of our attraction to them.