



MEWS-PARI

meaningful encounters with strangers
preservation and reenactment initiative

report no. 2



Introduction

An overview of MEWS-PARI and its reports

Most people have had a meaningful encounter with a stranger. These are usually out-of-the-blue (and sometimes jarring) interactions that come to take on special meaning for at least one of the people involved. They occur in public settings, and often cause two strangers to suddenly connect with each other in a way that neither had expected. Perhaps their most interesting aspect revolves around the meaning people take from them; the same encounter could be meaningful to one person, but easily forgotten by another—or meaningful in an entirely different way.

MEWS-PARI (the Meaningful Encounters with Strangers Preservation and Reenactment Initiative) documents and analyzes these types of encounters. It does so by:

1. collecting people's stories;
2. analyzing them (with charts and maps, and by trying to detect common themes); and
3. reenacting Dramatizations of these stories. These Dramatizations incorporate improvisation, are often open-ended, and sometimes involve passers-by.

All are welcome to join the Initiative. This can be done:

1. by submitting a story;
2. by reenacting a Dramatization; or
3. by doing both.

This report is part of a series that presents our findings. Each reproduces four of the stories we've so far, as well as dramatizations, charts and maps based on these stories.

More stories and data can be found at our website, <http://timdevin.com/encounters.html> ; we can be contacted at



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mews.pari@gmail.com . If you have a story you’d like to share, we hope you’ll get in touch!

Sincerely,

MEWS-PARI



Object 2(a): “The Truck Driver”

Element (i): *Original story by Michele Jaquis*

When I graduated from college in Hartford, Connecticut my cousins helped me pack up my apartment and I stayed with them in New Canaan for a few days before flying home to Florida. I had to postpone my flight by a day due to illness and if I hadn't done so I would have not encountered this stranger.

There were three of us on the airport shuttle bus, and normally I would've sat back with my Walkman and ignored the other passengers, but the man seated behind the driver needed to talk. He told us that he was a former IBM employee, who had been laid off years ago, after which he became a truck driver. I kept thinking, “He looks more like a computer guy than a truck driver,” as he told us that when he embarked on his new career his wife decided to join him and they became “paid tourists.” “It's the best job in the world!” He described all the places they got to visit, national parks, baseball stadiums, every place in the continental United States you could imagine. For the whole ride his monologue did not cease and he explained that he was on his way home for his wife's funeral. His company was paying for his flight and to ship his wife's body home. She had died of a heart attack while they were on the road only a few days ago and his devastation was apparent. He had spent every waking hour conversing with his wife as they shared the cab of their rented semi truck. He marveled about all the possible upgrades and luxuries one could acquire if the truck was owned instead of rented, TV sets, VCR's, plush couches, even hottubs.

Now anytime I see a tricked out semi on the freeway I think of him and wonder if he finally bought his own truck or if after the funeral he ventured back to computers.



Object 2(a): “The Truck Driver”

Element (ii)-a: *Dramatization #1 by MEWS-PARI*

Note: This version requires two people, and some improvisation.

Characters:

*The Storyteller, and
The Truck Driver*

Truck Driver: I drive a truck like that one.

Pause.

Storyteller: Oh?

Truck Driver: Well, mine’s orange. But the same make and model. I’ve been a driver for a while now. I used to work for IBM, but I was laid off. I’m glad now, though. Driving across country is wonderful. You get to see everything, the whole country. *(Reenactor playing Truck Driver lists a few scenic spots around the country that he or she has been to in real life, and describes why it was nice to see them.)* It’s gorgeous. Have you ever been there?

Storyteller: [answers yes or no, accordingly].

Truck Driver: My wife really liked it there. *(Pause.)* She used to drive around with me, almost from the start. Which made things a lot easier, the transition. And then, I got to see her all the time. Which you can’t do when you have a desk job. Anyway, she used to joke that we were “paid tourists.” It’s the best job in the world, I tell you. For a while we were trying to go to every major league baseball field, which was a fun way to organize your trips. I think we got to...jeez, must’ve been all but 2 of them. Except for Wrigley, which is in Chicago, and... Anyway, that was my wife’s idea, she is...was a big baseball fan.

Pause.

Storyteller: *(politely)* So where are you heading next? Anything special?

Truck Driver: Oh. Heading back home. My wife, she, um, passed away a few days ago.

Storyteller: Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.

Truck Driver: Heart attack. Company’s paying for me to take her back home. We shared the cab, so now it’ll be a little strange. I was thinking about redoing the interior, maybe rearranging things a bit. Use up the extra space.

Storyteller: Oh, I didn’t know you could do that.

Truck Driver: Well, I own it. Some people rent, I own ours. Mine.

Storyteller: No, I meant I didn’t know you had that much room. I guess I thought it was just the seats.

Truck Driver: For your local trucks, yeah, but for the big rigs, no. So you ever notice late at night all the rigs parked at rest stops? Well, there’s people sleeping in those rigs, and they’re not sitting up.

(Truck Driver, improvising, lists all the ways he can fix his cab up: TV sets, stereos, hot tubs, plush couches. Storyteller asks questions. Eventually, they both get off, and say goodbye.)

Object 2(a): “The Truck Driver”

Element (ii)-b: *Dramatization #2 by MEWS-PARI*

Note: This version requires one person, and involves a good deal of improvisation.

Characters:

*The Reenactor, and
Someone Nearby*

The **Reenactor** strikes up an innocent conversation with **Someone Nearby**. “Do you know what it’s supposed to be like tomorrow?” is a good one. Casually, the **Reenactor** mentions something that’s very important to him or her. This can include:

- something he or she is proud of,
- something sad that happened, or
- anything else.

The **Reenactor** doesn’t have to go into great detail, as this might make others uncomfortable—only enough to break through the polite “what a nice day”-style conversation.

Object 2(a): “The Truck Driver”

Element (iii): *Map*



Object 2(a): “The Truck Driver”

Element (iv): *Data*

Gender of storyteller	Female
Storyteller's age at the time of the encounter	Early 20s
Length of time between the encounter and when the story was written	About 10 years
Type of environment the encounter occurred in	While traveling
Type of environment the storyteller was living in at the time	Suburban (on a college campus, Hartford CT)
Distance from the place where the encounter took place, and the storyteller's home at the time	Variable: began 85 miles from home
State of mind of the storyteller when the encounter happened	During a period of change
What the storyteller was doing when the encounter happened	Traveling
Themes	Being told a good story Insight into others

Object 2(b): “The Lighter”

Element (i): *Original story by Tim Devin*

I was walking past CVS, smoking a cigarette, heading home from work. A guy with a clipboard said something, but I ignored him. This was something I did everyday, because I was convinced he was a con artist. Dodging him was part of my daily routine.

“Hey man, I just want a light.” He said, waving his con-artist fingers in my face.

“Oh, sure.” I handed him my lighter. It was a red one, with a funny picture on it—a conversation-piece type of thing that I’d nicked from someone along the way—one of those petty thefts we all do, that we always find ways to justify in our minds.

He looked at it, then frowned. “My old girlfriend used to have this lighter.” Pause. “I was just thinking about her. Actually.” He looked wistfully at the lighter, then at me.

“Huh, that’s funny,” I said dismissively, waiting for him to give it back. And then I frowned. “You know, an old friend of mine came into work today. I hadn’t thought about her in a while—but I’d had a dream about her last night.”

“Huh. Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Huh.”

Another pause. We were both looking at each other, lost in thought. Here we were on the sidewalk—me and a guy I recognized, but always thought badly of—having a very powerful connecting moment. He was no longer a creep, but someone with a rich

emotional life (just like me), who'd just experienced a powerful coincidence (just like me), that had taken him back to an older time, and brought up a bunch of old memories (again, just like me). All because of a red lighter I'd stolen from someone somewhere.

"Well, anyway, take care."

"Yeah, take care. Thanks for the light."



Object 2(b): "The Lighter"

Element (ii): *Dramatization by MEWS-PARI*

Note: This dramatization requires two people.

Characters:

*The Storyteller, and
A Possible Con Artist*

Storyteller, *smoking, walks hurriedly along, trying to dodge* **Con Artist**.

Con Artist: [mumbles something] (*Pause. Waves hand in front of* **Storyteller**.) Hey man, I just want a light.

Storyteller: Oh, sure. (*Hands him lighter.*)

Con Artist: (*Looks at lighter.*) My old girlfriend used to have this lighter. I was just thinking about her. Actually.

Storyteller: (*Dismissively*) Huh, that's funny. (*Pause. Now, interested:*) You know, an old friend of mine came into work today. I hadn't thought about her in a while—but I'd had a dream about her last night.

Con artist: (*looks interested*) Huh, really?

Storyteller: Yeah.

Con Artist: Huh.

Both characters look at each other for a few seconds.

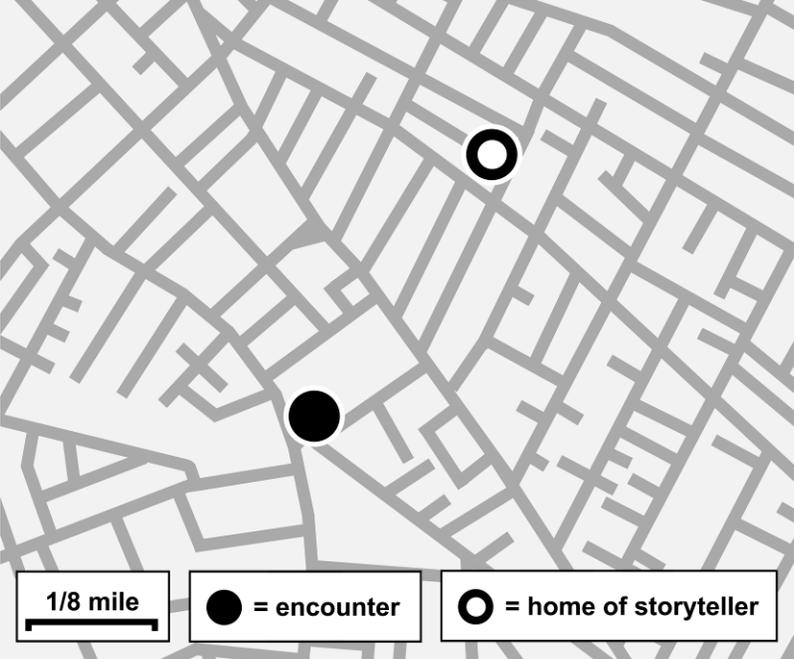
Storyteller: Well, anyway, take care.

Object 2(b): “The Lighter”

Element (iii): *Map*

Con artist: Yeah, take care. Thanks for the light.

Storyteller walks off.



Object 2(b): “The Lighter”

Element (iv): *Data*

Gender of storyteller	Male
Storyteller's age at the time of the encounter	Late 20s
Length of time between the encounter and when the story was written	5 years
Type of environment the encounter occurred in	Urban (Cambridge MA)
Type of environment the storyteller was living in at the time	Urban (Somerville MA)
Distance from the place where the encounter took place, and the storyteller's home at the time	1/4 mile
State of mind of the storyteller when the encounter happened	During a normal time of life
What the storyteller was doing when the encounter happened	Going about necessary daily activities
Themes	Coincidence Connection with others Reminder of the past

Object 2(c): “Light”

Element (i): *Original story by Frank*

Dear Grandmom,

I was 18 when I had my first out of body experience. It was my friend Brian Page's grandmother Eileen Dara who had passed away and she had been stuck sort of haunting her old house near Pike creek for a few weeks after her death. There were several strange occurrences that we all witnessed prior to the experience as Brian was staying at the house and inviting his friends over that made us suspicious. The first night I slept over at the house I awoke in the morning with my arm straight up in the air and all of the blood had drained away from it so it was numb and involuntarily flopping around (scary!) Once we left the house all locked up and returned to the house with the door ajar a strange cat exiting the house and as we entered every door in the house slammed shut at the same time.

Then Brian had given 3 different people personal items that had belonged to her. One day when I was just sitting in my dorm, as it was my first semester freshman year at University of Delaware, with another friend and I got up and arranged the objects in a pattern on my desk, put on a pair of her sunglasses sat back down, all of the objects began vibrating, then moving, there was a pill case and the lid popped off and out of it came a greenish energy or apparition of sorts, what I now understand to be her soul. It floated around in front of me and basically jumped into me through the area of my forehead above my eyes.....my eyes were now closed and the first thing I saw was the top of my head from above, then I proceeded to see her life flash before my eyes (and her eyes, we were basically sharing the experience together from this point). I saw her at birth, major events of her life, a model-t ford driving into Chicago in the winter, honeymoon at Niagara Falls, basically lots of pictures of major life events shown in chronological order up to the point where her body passed on in the hospital room and there

were people laughing and trying to make light hearted jokes and she thought they were laughing at her dying. At this point the most affirming thing on a practical level that I can tell you is that when the body dies the spirit does not. It maintains an awareness, a consciousness and an integrity all its own and keeps on going. Death is not an end, just a transformation.

She was very much under the influence of morphine because she had died of cancer so was very confused upon still "existing" after she had died and I believe this is part of the reason why I had to escort her. I was given knowledge that of all the people who had come in contact with her spirit after she had died I was the only one that had "No fear of immortality" so that's why the experience was happening to me.

After her life flashed before my eyes I basically carried her with me for about 5 days time. I was subject to her whims, likes, and dislikes, she called me out of most work and classes, formed her own opinions of the people in my life, watched soap operas and ate lots of ice cream, and essentially got an extra week to enjoy earthly pleasures and figure a few things out before making her journey. My memory of the week is somewhat vague and I can assume that I was as much her as I was me, two souls sharing one body, and some of my memories are intact, but some of them also went with her of her experiences of that week. At the end of the 5 days I instinctively got on the bus and headed towards the home of her daughter, Brian's mom, over the course of the bus ride I was fully seeing visions with my eyes open of the most beautiful mosaic patterns, like a kaleidoscope of stained glass with the most beautiful colors and constantly changing, we witnessed a red wolf-like monster made of light with horns and fangs and got really scared but that was the scariest thing we saw which I now think was just some sort of demon, not the devil or hell or anything. I was

basically moving her through some sort of limbo or netherworld advancing towards the light at this point. I saw a map of all men and women everywhere and they all turned to stars and then it was shown that the distance between any two people is the same no matter how many people lie between them or how much space or time. When I arrived at her daughters house and attempted to explain what was going on to her spirit her husband was like, "Are you on drugs?", so it was pretty difficult to explain all of the visions I was seeing.

I then basically took her upstairs to her bedroom she sat down on the bed, I took her hands and SHOWED her everything I was seeing. I tried one attempt to do this and had trouble so we said we'll try again later, went downstairs and basically it became too intense within minutes I said "NOW, NOW, we have to go upstairs", and we sat down again, I took her hands and all of the visions of the kaleidoscope of colors gave way to the most brilliant, beautiful light, comparable only to staring into the sun....I was sweating, I was shaking, I was trembling, and the last thing I saw was a silhouette of a person walking into that light as she JUMPED out of me THROUGH her daughter and into the light. I was thrown backwards into a chair, and the first words of her daughter were "How on earth were you able to carry this weight for so long?" At that point I was fully and solely me again and her daughter basically laid back on the bed and said goodbye to her mother.

That same night I went back to her house and sat in a circle with 2 of my friends and I held their hands and we all shared things from the past, things from the future, things from the recesses of our memories, and things from any and all places and spaces in time, with each other through visions....as a result of whatever way she came to me there was now a door open and through it I could KNOW things throw merely looking into that doorway and SHOW

people what it is like to look through that doorway. I basically swore to myself that I wouldn't abuse it by finding out knowledge of future events, though this happens to me quite frequently without even trying, and only to do good in the world. Accordingly I have helped some other people in my life since then by channeling specific messages to them, that I can only explain as coming from BEYOND, from that light, from higher powers, from spirits, whatever you want to call it, as well as on occasion allowing myself to be voluntarily possessed. And my current framework for understanding what that light was is ALL KNOWLEDGE, ALL TRUTH, AND ALL LOVE. And this is what I have come to understand that the meaning of it ALL is about.

There was a moment when confronted with that light when it was understood by me that I could know whatever I wanted and could ask any question of myself of it and I made a deliberate choice to ask NOTHING of it and I now think that this bespeaks of the purity of my spiritual constitution, in other words because of being of a selfless nature, that's why I was allowed to have such an experience.

And finally, if I'm so good and great a pure, how did I get to be this way? Is it something I TRY to do consciously? No I don't think so at all. I just have always followed MY OWN INDIVIDUAL PATH IN LIFE and followed it correctly, and learned lessons where there are lessons to be learned, and been true to my own nature. Anybody can do it and I really just learned a lot about a process that we all go through and am eager to help as many people as I can understand life, in understanding the nature or their own individual paths, and ultimately the meaning of death. I hope that you find this helpful.....if my story has a moral it's that I know the meaning of life,

the universe, and everything.....easy, it's LOVE, everything and everyone and unconditionally!

Love,
Your grandson



Object 2(c): “Light”

Element (ii): *Dramatization by MEWS-PARI*

Note: This dramatization requires three people, and involves some improvisation.

Characters:

*Storyteller,
Friend’s Mother, and
Friend’s Father*

Scene 1

Storyteller walks around, trying to imagine that there is another spirit inside his or her head—specifically, the spirit of his or her best friend’s deceased grandmother. (We’re just pretending here; no need to summon any spirits.) Look at the buildings and trees and such around you, and try to imagine that someone else is looking at them too, and imagine what they might be thinking about. Try to notice details you’ve overlooked, and imagine how those details might be significant to someone else. Keep this up for a good few minutes at least.

Scene 2

Friend’s Mother and *Friend’s Father* stare at *Storyteller* in disbelief, confused.

Friend’s Father: You...I’m sorry, what did you just say?

Storyteller: I know it sounds kind of crazy, but it’s true. I put on her glasses, and touched some of the items that you gave your son, that used to belong to his grandmother, and now...I know it sounds

crazy. But now I’ve got her spirit inside me.

Friend’s Mother and *Friend’s Father* exchange a few looks. Eyebrows raise and lower. *Friend’s Mother* nods to *Friend’s Father*.

Friend’s Father: Sit down. Listen. Are you on drugs? It’s okay, you don’t have to tell us. And we won’t tell your parents.

Friend’s Mother: It’s okay, don’t worry. You can stay here, we don’t want you wandering around anymore. You can stay in Brian’s room tonight if you want.

Friend’s Father: Yeah, hey. We know that in college... people... experiment with things. We know all about that. It’s fine. It’s okay, really. But the important thing is that you shouldn’t be wandering around like this. Especially not in a part of town you’re not used to.

Friend’s Mother: Absolutely. And any friend of our son’s is... welcome here.

Friend’s Father: (to *Friend’s Mother*) Do you think Brian, um...

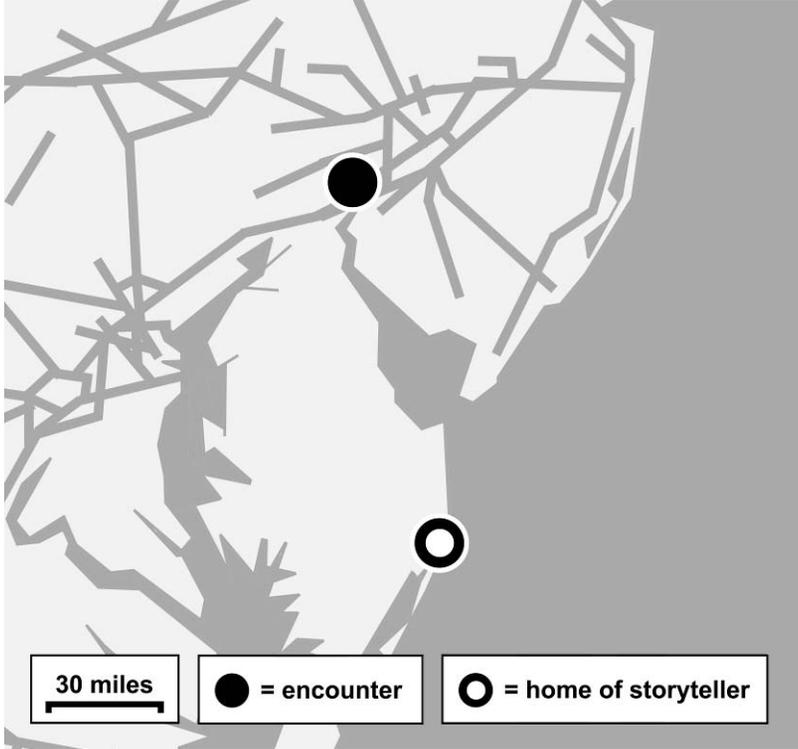
Friend’s Mother: (to *Friend’s Father*) I really hope not. God.

Storyteller: (sighs) Here’s let me show you.

Storyteller brings *Friend’s Mother* to another area. *Friend’s Father* shakes head, stays where he or she is.

Friend’s Mother: (suddenly confused) Have you been here before?

Object 2(c): “Light”
Element (iii): *Map*



Storyteller: No. I know my way around because of your mother’s spirit. I mean, your mother’s spirit knows my way around. Her way around.

Storyteller takes both of **Friend’s Mother’s** hands. **Storyteller** closes eyes, starts to tremble. **Friend’s Mother** looks baffled, but then starts to tremble too, and closes eyes. **Both Reenactors** at this point imagine a spirit passing from **Storyteller’s** body to **Friend’s Mother’s** body.

Friend’s Mother lets go, and looks around, bewildered.

Friend’s Mother: How on earth were you able to carry this weight for so long?

Reenactor playing Friend’s Mother imagines that he or she is now carrying the spirit. **Friend’s Mother** sits down, and prepares to say goodbye, for the last time, to this spirit that is very important to him or her.

Storyteller walks away, towards **Friend’s Father**.

Friend’s Father: How you feeling?

Storyteller: Good. I gave the spirit to your wife. She has it now.

Friend’s Father: Oh, that’s great. Listen, we’ve got a few movies from Blockbuster in the den. Did you want to watch one? One of them’s a kung fu flick. (*Smirks*) And we’ve got some snacks if you’re...you know, hungry. (*Chuckles.*)

Object 2(c): “Light”

Element (iv): *Data*

Gender of storyteller	Male
Storyteller's age at the time of the encounter	18
Length of time between the encounter and when the story was written	About 15 years
Type of environment the encounter occurred in	Suburban (Wilmington DE)
Type of environment the storyteller was living in at the time	Suburban (Ocean City MD)
Distance from the place where the encounter took place, and the storyteller's home at the time	116 miles
State of mind of the storyteller when the encounter happened	During a period of change
What the storyteller was doing when the encounter happened	Engaged in leisure activities
Themes	Connection with others Spiritual/religious

Object 2(d): “Shoving”

Element (i): *Original story by Anonymous*

I saw a clear shot to the trolley door. People were still coming out, but I'd been having a bad time lately—so I started to worm my way on, bumping people along the way. I was going through a rough point in my life, and wasn't acting very nicely that day.

A guy near the door pushed his hand, football-style, elbow locked, at my shoulder. And started shoving me back the way I came. He had a blank face, no expression—actually, he didn't even look at me. But I was in his way, and he was using me to get through the crowd. He wasn't acting very nicely either.

Like I said, I'd been having a bad time lately. A month earlier, I'd been forced out of an apartment I loved in a nice neighborhood—and had moved to a roach-filled basement in a bad part of town 8 miles away, because that was all I could afford. Since I'd moved, many of the people I had considered my friends had stopped calling me, and I wasn't sure why. Then, one day, my boss told me they were getting rid of my job. My whole life was rapidly going down hill, and I couldn't do a thing about it. I wasn't very happy, that day on the subway platform.

But here was this man, shoving me. That, I could do something about. So I grabbed him by the jacket collar. And slammed him into a pole. I started swearing long strings of swear words at him. And waving my finger, and then my fist, in his face. He was wearing a tan leather jacket. I don't remember anything else about him.

A college kid nearby muttered “Hey, take it easy man.” He was wearing a red baseball hat.

“Yeah!” I yelled. “You gotta take it easy! Stop shoving people around!”

I'd gotten through the last half of that last sentence, when I realized the college student had been talking to me.

I really did need to take it easy. My life was getting out of control, but that didn't mean I had to get out of control too. My problems weren't my fault, but they weren't the fault of anybody else around me either. The college kid was right: I did need to take things easy. I turned back around towards the train, and suddenly my way was clear.



Object 2(d): "Shoving"

Element (ii)-a: *Dramatization #1 by MEWS-PARI*

Note: This version requires three people, and some improvisation.

Characters:

*The Storyteller,
Another Angry Man, and
A College Kid.*

*The **Storyteller** is trying to get on a subway train before everyone has gotten off.*

*The **Angry Man** is on the train. He or she starts pushing **Storyteller**, football-linebacker-style, back onto the platform.*

*The **Storyteller** grabs the **Angry Man** by the shirt collar, and slams him or her against a pole.*

Storyteller: (improvises a long string of insults and swears.) What are you trying to do? Who the hell do you think you are?

***Angry Man** stands still, not looking at the **Storyteller**.*

College Kid: Hey, take it easy, man.

Storyteller: Yeah! You gotta take it easy! Stop shoving people around!

College Kid: (quietly) I was talking to you, dude.

*Pause. **Storyteller** looks at **College Kid**. **Storyteller** stops swearing, and seems to regret his or her anger.*

College Kid and Angry Man stare after **Storyteller**, as he or she turns around and walks away.



Object 2(d): “Shoving”

Element (ii)-b: *Dramatization #2 by MEWS-PARI*

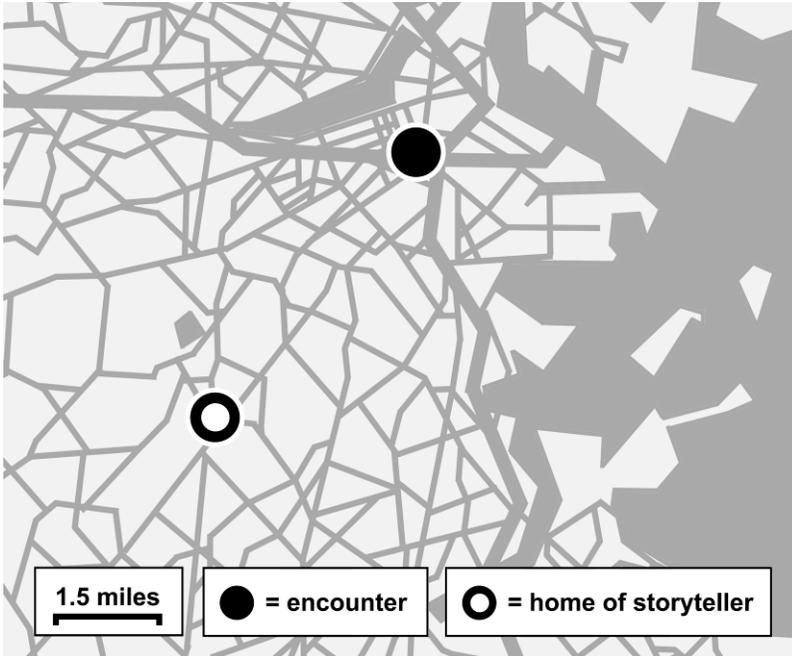
Note: This version requires one person, and involves a good deal of improvisation.

Characters:

*The Reenactor, and
The Next Rude Person the Reenactor Sees.*

The Next Rude Person the Reenactor Sees is being rude to someone for no reason. The **Reenactor** says something to him or her about it, instead of standing by pretending not to notice.

Object 2(d): “Shoving”
 Element (iii): *Map*



Object 2(d): “Shoving”
 Element (iv): *Data*

Gender of storyteller	Male
Storyteller's age at the time of the encounter	Late 20s
Length of time between the encounter and when the story was written	2 years
Type of environment the encounter occurred in	Urban (Boston MA)
Type of environment the storyteller was living in at the time	Urban (Jamaica Plain MA)
Distance from the place where the encounter took place, and the storyteller's home at the time	5 miles
State of mind of the storyteller when the encounter happened	During a bad time of life
What the storyteller was doing when the encounter happened	Going about necessary daily activities
Themes	Anger Insight into self



Notes