

The Radical Utopian Power of Documentary Performance and *Convivencia*

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Abstract

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What do a devised community-based performance piece, *Every Girl's a Hero*; a scripted documentary play, *The People's Temple*; and a series of YouTube videos, including Pussy Riot's protest performance in Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, their "Punk Prayer" music video, and the #Freepussyriot México music video, have in common? Documentary performance. Given current movements such as community-based or community-engaged arts projects, devised theatre, and performance as research methodologies (e.g., PaR/ PARIP/ PBR), I propose documentary performance as a frame for this growing corpus of work. Each is a live and/or recorded performance that utilizes documentary materials as their foundation—the words and lived experiences of those participating in the piece. Each is particularly moving *because* it celebrates and brings into focus the testimonies, sometimes through song, of everyday people. The potency and poetry of these works come from their genuine and quotidian nature, yet the statements they are making are anything but commonplace. Through thick description, borderlands performance studies, participant observations, and autoethnography, and by employing the theories of utopian

performatives and critical pedagogy, I investigate the work these pieces do to create, even for a moment, utopia in the here and now.

In the tradition of theorist José Esteban Muñoz, and activist Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos I queer and radicalize the term utopia to open up the possibility of multiple versions of a better world. Rather than offering one highly regulated vision of utopia, through documentary performance each case queers the term, which not only reclaims the concept from historically fascistic uses, but also provides distinct examples of utopia.

While each documentary performance piece is born of a traumatic event or situation (homelessness, mass murder/suicide, colonialism, and authoritarianism), they all offer moments of joy, kinship, hope, and a plurality of utopias. They each express the Latina feminist notion of *convivencia*, the conviction that being together to make and witness art is a political act that can lead to change

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Dedication

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The Radical Utopian Power of Documentary Performance and *Convivencia*

A utopian performative is a mode of thinking and seeing that relies on the magic of performance practice, on a belief in social justice and a better future, on the impact and import of a wish, and on love for human commonality despite the vagaries of difference.

Jill Dolan, "Utopia in Performance," 171

Introduction

What do a devised performance piece from a community-based project, traditional documentary theater, and music videos posted on YouTube have in common? These are questions I asked myself when drawn to the specific case studies I treat in this dissertation. I realized that I found each particularly moving *because* they celebrate and bring into focus the words (sometimes through song) and lived experiences of people like me. These are not the testimonies and stories of powerful decision makers, titans of industry, royalty, or even celebrated artists. Some names and events may be familiar to the general public but many would not. The potency and poetry of these works emanates from their genuine and quotidian nature. Yet the ideas they articulate are anything but commonplace. These are not "slice of life" pieces without a point of view. Each work of art makes a strong statement about how the world *should* be and with whom the artists stand in solidarity. They address unwieldy and even taboo dilemmas such as homelessness, mass murder/suicide, colonialism, and authoritarianism. While all these works are born of traumatic events or situations, they each offer moments of joy, kinship, hope, utopia, or even a plurality of utopias. They each express the Latina feminist notion

of *convivencia*, the conviction that being together to make and witness this art is a political act that can lead to change (Habell-Pallán et al. 68). The richness and complexity of these pieces come from not just exploring the human condition but also from documenting it as an intervention to disrupt these conditions.

In this dissertation I will investigate documentary performance, which I define as live and recorded performances that utilize documentary materials as their foundation—the words and lived experiences of those participating in the production of the performance piece. Documentary performance uses documentation (e.g., verbatim interview excerpts, archival materials, video and audio recordings) to create a piece of performed art. My case studies include a devised community-based performance piece, *Every Girl's a Hero*; a scripted documentary play, *The People's Temple*; and a series of videos including Pussy Riot's protest performance in Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, their "Punk Prayer" music video, the #Freepussyriot México music video, and the recording of political activist Maria Alyokhina's speech in Mexico. Lastly, I discuss my creation of *Start All Over: A Tacoma Civil Rights Performance Walk*, a site-specific participatory performance piece and sound collages created from oral histories.

The case studies I treat in this dissertation offer a variety of art forms. Therefore, I use the term documentary performance to distinguish it from documentary theater in much the same way Jan Cohen-Cruz utilizes community-based performance instead of community-based theatre. Both community-based performance and documentary performance encompass theatre as well as other types of art created through these distinct methodologies.

Key Questions

If one conducts a library search for the term documentary performance or looks for it in an academic journal database the results usually center on documentary film. If there are articles on live documentary performance these usually focus on traditional documentary theatre such as *The People's Temple*. What I am addressing is the proliferation of documentary-based performance pieces since the 1990s. I am using documentary performance as an umbrella term to describe these pieces, which vary in form but share documentary content as their foundation. Current movements such as community-based or community-engaged arts projects, devised theatre, autoethnography, and performance as a research methodologies, all lend themselves to the use of documentary raw material. Such methodologies include:

- Performance as Research (PaR)
- Practice as Research in Performance (PARIP)
- Practice Based Research (PBR)

I propose documentary performance as the term needed to frame this growing corpus of work.

In addition to addressing the need for documentary performance as a category, I explore in this dissertation the key issues these various forms of documentary performance share. Documentary performance has been used in service of restorative justice in response to an injustice or trauma. Legal scholars Jennifer J. Llewellyn and Robert Howse differentiate restorative justice from retributive justice as “the notion that a social equality or equilibrium has been disrupted (or further disrupted) by the offence and that it must be restored through social action ” (Llewellyn and Howse 357). In other words, restorative justice must include “righting a wrong” and rebuilding disrupted social bonds (357). For example, in *The People's Temple*, the names, words, and histories of individuals involved in the mass murder/suicide event in

Jonestown in 1978 are shared in an attempt to redress the injustice of lumping all Temple members into one monolithic category known as “cult.” Sharing their stories through the play and post-show conversations were an attempt to rebuild social bonds and facilitate some level of community healing.

Studying the role of performance in restorative justice is not a new concept. In addition to Llewellyn and Howse, theatre scholar Catherine Cole has studied the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as a vehicle for restorative justice, particularly the “unique and defining aspect of the commission-its public, embodied, and performed dimensions” (Cole 167). The performative element of public testimony allows victims to document otherwise unseen or forgotten injustices in their own words and with the community and public officials as their witnesses. Cole points to restorative justice as a “victim-centered” process that “requires this level of attention to testimony” (187).

Various iterations of documentary theater have used the subject of restorative justice processes such as the TRC, conventional court cases, or government inquiries. For example, *Ubu and The Truth Communion* by Jane Taylor utilizes verbatim testimony from the TRC. The UK’s Tricycle Theatre is well known for its Tribunal Plays, which examine British politics through verbatim testimony from legal and governmental proceedings. As I mention in Chapter Two, Emily Mann’s 1985 *Execution of Justice* is a early example of contemporary documentary theatre which details the trial of Dan White for the murder of George Moscone and Harvey Milk. Now I would like to consider the role of other forms of documentary performance, not just documentary theater, in facilitating restorative justice.

Some animating questions for this study are as follows: How does one respectfully address individual and community trauma? How can those living in the trauma, survivors of

trauma, and family members of those lost to the trauma be ethically engaged in the process and product of documentary performance? How can reciprocal relationships be cultivated and maintained between individuals with unequal access to resources? What additional events or resources must be deployed to facilitate productive collaborations and conversations? How do the market forces of commercial theatre and academia impact these ethical imperatives? What are the pedagogical implications for this work? How can long-term, or even temporary but tactical, political coalitions and actions come from these projects?

Argument

After examining these case studies, a small but diverse sampling of documentary performance forms, I argue that documentary performance is fertile ground for utopian performatives or moments in performance that “make palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better, were the goals of social justice achieved” (Dolan, “Utopia in Performance” 165). Hearing the trials our fellow community members have endured and the artistry of their words and actions can activate deep empathy, or intersubjective understanding. Through this understanding, strangers become neighbors, if only for the length of the performance. These brief but impactful moments of attachment allow us to feel what a better world might be like. While I recognize that the term utopia can also have a negative valence due to its association with oppressive political movements, I am using it here in the tradition of Jill Dolan and José Esteban Muñoz who use the term “utopian performative” to describe a moment in performance that lifts one out of an oppressive present that may seem overwhelming and unchangeable. In these brief moments we feel a hope that a different world is possible and, motivated by that hope, we may take action. Therefore, my use of “utopia” is a queering of the original meaning, which, in its drive for a

world structured according to a unified vision, is complicit with structures that allow for suffering. My reclaiming of utopia is indebted to queer theories and queer theorists such as Muñoz and Dolan. This communal glimpse of a more just world and the shared desire to make it so is also a form the Latina feminist methodology of *convivencia*, the deliberate convening to collectively produce arts or do social justice work (Gonzalez 94-95). This work is also informed by Latina feminist scholarship.

Generating feelings of understanding, empathy, compassion, and validation are particularly important when using documentary performance to address trauma, as was the case with these examples. Furthermore, these “real stories” can disrupt what we think we know and provide complex and nuanced perspectives by conducting performative historiography, which is “enunciating a particular selection and arrangement of records and reifying a carefully curated view of the past” through performance (Magelssen 19). In a world of instant access to information, sometimes from dubious sources, our society has become used to quick and easily repeatable answers. While audiences might not be willing to spend months interviewing survivors of the Jonestown tragedy, volunteering at a homeless shelter, or researching the reception of Pussy Riot in Mexico, they may sit through a play, performance piece, or a music video. Documentary performance pieces can grab people’s attention by inviting them in with the familiar or commonplace and then introducing new perspectives, information, and imagery that add dimension to or even contradict pat answers and established explanations.

The inherently participatory nature of documentary performance makes it an ideal vehicle for community engagement, public scholarship, and critical pedagogy. Latina scholars and art practitioners such as Martha Gonzalez and Michelle Habell-Pallán, have detailed the use of *convivencia* as a means of generating scholarly and artistic work through participatory means. As

I detail in the following chapters, the raw material for documentary performances must be gathered or generated by engaging with community partners, visiting sites, and accessing formal and informal archives. Methods used in my case studies include participant observations, interviews, archival research, neighborhood tours, creating audio and video recordings, and facilitating a story circle. Participants become collaborators with varying levels of agency over the final product. These partnerships make documentary performance more difficult, time-consuming, and rewarding. Process becomes just as important as the product and both can be fraught with ethical dilemmas, which I detail in the following chapters.

As a form of critical pedagogy, documentary performance projects offer students the chance to engage their critical consciousness by connecting with their community, learning about local issues, and doing something to address them. Students learn by applying their knowledge, skills, and backgrounds to settings outside the traditional classroom. In fact, in this model, the community becomes the classroom. Ideally, these are equitable partnerships between academic institutions and community groups where everyone is a teacher, a student, and an artist. As a setting for critical pedagogy, documentary performance again presents ethical challenges as well as tremendous benefits.

Finally, I contend that these documentary performances are particularly moving and resonant because they convey “real” lives and stories rather than imaginary ones. These subjects are rich with history, cultural connections, and intersectional identities that make their narratives simultaneously one of a kind and common. Pussy Riot’s experience of persecution and incarceration is uniquely their own and shaped by the current political structure in Russia. Yet their grievances against Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church can be understood by citizens around the world who face similar forms of oppression. And that

recognition can be so strong that it compels other artists, in this case Mexican singers and musicians, to respond in solidarity with a documentary performance of their own. These stories tap into layered historical and transcultural connections and express the type of urgency and timeliness that can engender action. The repetition of these actions/responses, made possible by the accessibility of technology and the Internet, a key strategy of fourth wave feminism, reveals and builds a transnational network I label a feminist activist diaspora, a queering and decolonizing use of the term diaspora (Gopinath 18). Through shared visual documentary images, transcultural communication can cross borders and bridge language barriers. Therefore, I see the potential for building and maintaining transnational and transcultural networks, a material outcome of documentary performance. These networks can be a global form of *convivencia*.

Survey of Previous Scholarship

My work is indebted to the various scholars of documentary, political, queer, and feminist theatre as well as performance studies including Janelle Reinelt, Sue-Ellen Case, Peggy Phelan, and Carol Martin. Martin's "Bodies of Evidence" and *Dramaturgy of the Real* have been particularly helpful in considering the history and recent proliferation of documentary theatre as well as its inherently political nature. She highlights the danger of the term documentary theatre, which connotes authority by presenting not just "a version" of a true story but what audiences may consider to be "the version" of the story and asks the provocative question, "Is documentary theatre just another form of propaganda?" (Martin 11). Informed by her work, I take it as a given that all documentary performance has a point of view, an agenda, a message. My concern is harnessing the power of that message for political, pedagogical, and therapeutic purposes. Martin has studied the *Laramie Project* and *Fires in the Mirror*, two seminal works of documentary

theater in the US, which I consider the progenitors of *The People's Temple*. All three address a traumatic community event through a collage of edited verbatim interviews.

The verbatim nature of these works highlights their employment of “restored” or “twice performed behavior,” which performance studies scholar Richard Schechner describes as “strips of behavior” that can have already occurred before but can be arranged for a particular effect, leading Martin to assert that originality or invention in documentary theatre therefore occurs at the level of “arrangement and context” (10). When actors speak the exact words and perform the exact gestures of “real people” they are not those people but, in Schechner’s parlance, they are “not not” those people. Or as Martin explains, “[t]he absent, unavailable, dead and disappeared make an appearance by means of surrogation” (10). Surrogation was indeed the goal and aesthetic of *The People's Temple*.

Surrogation requires the archive (documents) and the repertoire (embodied memory, oral history) as theorized by performance studies scholar Diana Taylor. In documentary theatre the archive becomes repertoire through the work of the actor or through technology such as audio or video recordings (10). All of these techniques were used in *The People's Temple* not only to reanimate people’s words, but also to express the repertoire, or the exhilarating, terrifying, and/or promising context in which the words were spoken or sung. I extend this connection between documentary theater, the archive, and the repertoire by arguing that, in addition to turning the archive into repertoire, the play text itself contributes to the archive and, when performed, adds to the repertoire. Additionally, the archive is expanded, because through documentary theater’s research and devising process new interviews are generated, transcribed, performed, and memorialized in the text of the play. In this way, documentary theatre specifically, and documentary performance generally, attempt to address Martin’s critique of the archive as

inherently incomplete and biased, because someone decides what is—and what is not—archived. I argue that the political point of view of much of documentary theater and documentary performance is to bring marginalized voices into the archive, to create a platform for repertoire excluded from our scriptocentric conception of the archive, and in so doing to trouble the doxa, or accepted understanding of people and events.

Diana Taylor's work also informs this study through her research on Latin American history and performance, particularly in Mexico. In her book, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Taylor considers the prevalence of syncretism in Latin America particularly as it relates to spiritual and cultural identity. She identifies a "both/and" strategy that Mexicans have used to both embrace Spanish Catholicism and retain Indigenous spiritual practices, resulting in a mestizo form of Mexican Catholicism (Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* 96). Her work on the Virgin Mary or Virgen de Guadalupe and the myth of the brown virgin is key to my arguments in Chapter Three. I contend that, because Pussy Riot is appealing to the Virgin Mary, whom they refer to as Mary Mother of God, their acts in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour are not taken as sacrilegious by Mexican feminists. Latina feminists including Maria Pilar Aquino have noted that in Latina feminist theology, the Virgin Mary is considered a feminist icon. Therefore, it is only appropriate that members of Pussy Riot appeal to her for help fighting the corruption of Russian President Vladimir Putin and the complicity of the Orthodox Russian Church (Pilar Aquino et al. 210–11).

In Chapter Three I also argue that Pussy Riot's actions and videos as well as the video #Freepussyriot Mexico are decolonizing acts because they utilize transcultural imagery and the Internet to tap into and reaffirm a feminist activist diaspora that transcends geopolitical borders. Therefore, for this case study I employ borderlands performance studies, as articulated by

scholars Chela Sandoval, Arturo J. Aldama, and Peter J. García in the introduction to their collection *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands* (Aldama et al. 1–28). Borderlands performance studies is a form of performance studies that takes as its subjects decolonizing acts. Latinx scholars have noted that the foundational works by performance studies pioneers, such as Richard Schechner, have failed to cite Latina feminist scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, who have long theorized the performative nature of identity within the Latinx experience. Luis Valdez, Augusto Boal, Paula Gunn Allen, are just a few of the Latinx and Indigenous scholars and artists who have recognized that performance has been and continues to be a strategy to remap and decolonize the Americas since the moment of European invasion (20). To that end, borderlands performance studies investigates the liberatory nature of performance.

In addition to liberation, performance provides a method for revisiting and interrogating traumatic moments in history. Performance studies scholar Scott Magelssen and film scholars Ann Siomopoulos and Patricia Zimmerman offer examples of performative historiography. In Chapter Two I assert that *The People's Temple* is a work of performative historiography because it arranges documents and other evidence through performance in order to offer a specific view of past events (Magelssen 19). In so doing, the play destabilizes accepted notions of the Jonestown tragedy and the members of Peoples Temple. By offering not just a new way to see this painful event, but also one that celebrates the lives of Temple members, the play was a platform for deferred conversations, deeper understanding, and much needed individual and community healing.

Community trauma and engagement were ever-present themes in the performance piece *Every Girl's a Hero*. The piece was the culmination of a year-long partnership between students from the University of Washington (UW) School of Drama and the Elizabeth Gregory Home

(EGH), a day shelter in Seattle, Washington, for women experiencing homelessness. I detail this project in Chapter One, and will hereafter refer to this case study as the EGH project. Jen Harvie's *Theatre & The City* illustrated specific delights and traumas inherent in an urban setting. Methods for addressing these issues through art include Practice as Research in Performance (PARIP) utilized by scholars including Angela Piccini and Baz Kershaw, and Performance as Research (PaR) applied by Mark Fleishman, as well as Community-Based Performance (CBP) employed by scholars and practitioners such as Jan Cohen-Cruz. Piccini and Kershaw's "Practice as Research in Performance: From Epistemology to Evaluation" and Fleishman's "The Difference of Performance as Research" were valuable sources for teasing out the specific goals and methods of PaR and PARIP to compare and contrast those with CBP. *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* by Cohen-Cruz and *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism*, edited by Cohen-Cruz and Mandy Schutzman, clearly define the ethical contours of CBP and Boal's techniques such as Forum Theatre and critical pedagogy. In these methods, process is critical and at times more important than product (Cohen-Cruz 109). Reciprocity, or the principle that relationships between artist and community members are "mutually nourishing" and that all participants have agency throughout the process, are cornerstones to CBP collaborations (93). Reciprocity is not necessarily a value of PaR/PAIP. Since the EGH project shared elements of both CBP and PaR/PAIP, I contend that the project was a hybrid of these and exists on a spectrum of community-participation somewhere between the two.

"Notes on Women Who Rock: Making Scenes, Building Communities: Participatory Research Community Engagement, and Archival Practice," by Michelle Habell-Pallán, Sonnet Retman, Angelica Macklin, and Monica De La Torre, gave me another way to think about the

EGH project and community-engaged scholarship. Rather than placing the EGH project between the polarities of PaR/PAIP and CBP, the experience and the resulting performance piece, *Every Girl's a Hero*, are examples of *convivencia* (Habell-Pallán et al. 68). *Convivencia*, a “signature pedagogy” of Latina feminists and feminists of color, is the intentional gathering of individuals to work together in the pursuit of collective aims such as art making, social justice work, and the co-creation of knowledge (68-69).

Martha Gonzalez details examples of *convivencia* in her book *Chican@ Artivistas: Music, Community, and Transborder Tactics in East Los Angeles*. As an artist-activist or *artivista*, Gonzalez uses music making and performance as a site for *testimonio*, through collective songwriting and the sharing of songs individuals have learned through relationships and their culture. She notes that her music can be a “a liberatory process, a deliberate act of love, and a source of empowerment for self and community” (Gonzalez 1). This description matches the art practice I experienced as a theatre maker on the EGH project. The power of the experience was not the final product but the process of being together with the EGH community, collectively reflecting on those memories with my fellow theatre artists through the devising process, and then sharing and discussing the performance piece with the women of the EGH, all of which were acts of *convivencia*. Gonzalez states that writing about her art making process and these moments of *convivencia* requires an autoethnographic lens, because these projects are intimate and personal (6–7). Autoethnography, as a self-reflective form of qualitative research, helps scholars examine their work and connect it to the larger cultural context. Inspired by her book, I too have used an autoethnographic approach to writing about my experience in the EGH project and my identity as an *artivista*.

The EGH project was also a work of performance ethnography as delineated by scholars and artists such as Joni Jones, D. Soyini Madison, and E. Patrick Johnson. Johnson's book, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* and his accompanying oral history performance, *Sweet Tea: The Play*, as well as his article *From Page to Stage: The Making of Sweet Tea*, were useful models for turning ethnographic working into a theatrical piece, and writing a scholarly investigation of that journey. These are all processes I have done or am doing with *Every Girl's a Hero*. For *Sweet Tea: The Play*, Johnson turned the oral histories of gay Black men in the South, which he collected and chronicled in his book, into a solo show. Just as Joni Jones defines performance ethnography as a method that "translates fieldwork experiences into performances," Johnson adds that performance could do something his ethnographic publication could not (Jones, "Performance Ethnography" 7). He writes, "[f]or the page could not capture the vocal cadence, verbal ticks, nonverbal cues, and intimacy created through oral history performance" (Johnson 248). In addition to expanding the information provided in his book, or the archive, the production itself allowed him to "ask larger questions about how to stage ethnographic fieldwork" (249). These questions considered the effectiveness of staged ethnographic work and its ethics. "How," Johnson asks, "does moving the narratives from the printed page and the mostly private space of a reader to the stage with a public audience alter their meaning?" and "[h]ow does the researcher sustain the focus on the men and their stories rather than the researcher and his talents as a performer?" (249).

I explore similar questions in Chapter One with the EGH project and in Chapter Two with *The People's Temple*. While not purporting to be publishing a work of ethnography, Leigh Fondakowski, the writer and director of *The People's Temple*, also released a book with longform versions of the interviews used to create the play. In my interview with Fondakowski,

she noted that the text of the interviews provides an incomplete understanding of the words and only through performance could a fuller meaning be accessed (Fondakowski Interview).

“Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity” by Joni Jones was another model of fieldwork translated into performance, with the added dimension of community-engagement on many levels. For her performance installation *Searching for Osun*, about living in Nigeria and studying the Yoruba culture, audience members walked through, as well as participated in, various activities and stations. Jones also recruited African American women to wear traditional Nigerian clothing and perform Nigerian dances. Doing so was a way to bring ethnographic items and repertoire to life, which exemplifies her “audience-centered brand of performance ethnography” (Jones, "Performance Ethnography" 7). She contrasts this approach with scripted performance ethnography, such as D. Soyini Madison’s *Trokosi*, a piece based on her work in Ghana and Myron Beasley’s autoethnographic installation in which performers share their experience with Yoruba culture as Black gay men. Community participation in the process and the product of the EGH project is a topic I discuss extensively in Chapter One. Jones states that having African American performers wear Nigerian clothing and perform Nigerian activities and dances was a way to “disrupt notions of ‘the real’ by encouraging the participants to question what they accept as truth, and to examine how their truths are shaped by their perspectives” (1). Getting the audience to question what they thought they knew about homelessness, while presenting them with the “real” lives of EGH women through our subjective lens, was also a goal of *Every Girl’s a Hero*.

I appreciated Jones’ backward glance on the piece and its reception. Like Martha Gonzalez she too uses an autoethnographic approach in her writing and in the structuring of her performance ethnographies. In fact, in an earlier iteration of *Searching for Oshun*, a character

named Joni the Ethnographer shared much of Jones' story with the audience. Jones writes, "I felt that this autoethnography, in which I was the subject or context, began to obscure the ethnographic details of Yoruba life, and after a few performances I felt as though I wasn't learning much new about myself or the Yoruba" (9). Here Jones points to both the necessity and limits of an autoethnographic approach in performance ethnography. Relying on it too much can decenter the subject and shine too much light on the ethnographer. This anecdote illustrates subjectivity, one of the six principles that, she asserts, "underscore the personal nature of fieldwork and the bodily understandings that can be derived from performance" (8). The other five principles Jones' details are context, accountability, multivocality, participation, and ethics (7-11). While I found value contemplating all six, the principle of subjectivity was the most consequential for the EGH project. She encourages ethnographers to fully examine their "powerful subjectivity" and consider how they will explicitly situate themselves in the work (9). She reminds ethnographers that they don't just present culture, but "act as interpreters of culture" (9). This concept was key as I considered how my cohort and I chose to interpret the culture of the EGH through our performance piece and why we made those choices.

While devising *Every Girl's a Hero*, my fellow theatre students and I debated how much of our own story to bring into the piece. We knew we wanted the work to center the lives of the women of the EGH but the piece had to be about our shared experience. Additionally, we couldn't pretend like this was the *real* or *true* experience of the EGH, but *our* experience with the EGH after months of work exchange hours and interviews. We could give those who have only spent a brief amount of time there a window into how sustained engagement and *convivencia* could alter that experience. Through our subjective lens, or in Jones' words, "as

interpreters of culture,” we expressed the joy we found at the EGH, and ultimately the piece told not just our story, or their story, but the story of our relationship.

When considering the pedagogical implications of the EGH project I first consulted Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, since I knew the project possessed some of the elements of critical pedagogy as first theorized and practiced by Freire. I then explored various applications of critical pedagogy around the world as chronicled in the *Internationalization of Critical Pedagogy Reader* edited by Antonia Darder, Peter Mayo, João Paraskeva and *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization* edited by M. Coté, R. J. F. Day, and G. De Peuter. Utopian pedagogy as a concept was a turning point for this study because it named what I and many of my fellow drama students felt was the most palpable aspect of the EGH project—the embodied experience of utopia.

In their introduction, Coté, Day, and De Peuter introduce the case studies within the collection as heterogenous and coming from inside and outside academia, yet these projects are all “*radically* utopian” in their resistance to neoliberalism (Coté et al. 3). They proclaim that

[t]his utopianism, our contributors overwhelmingly agree, has nothing to do with rationalistic dreams of a future perfect society. The critiques and experiments they document here are attempts to carve out spaces for becoming--through resistance, hope, and reconstruction in the here-and-now--in various sites around the globe.

(3)

This description perfectly encapsulated my EGH experience. The utopia I felt during the project was not an idealized perfect place but a better version of the here-and-now, where human connection and hope could, if only briefly, overcome the class hierarchy and market forces that cause and perpetuate homelessness. In this way, utopian pedagogy takes Friere’s conception of

critical pedagogy and operationalizes it through projects that invoke utopian performatives as theorized by Jill Dolan, which I discuss in the following pages.

The term utopian pedagogy expands the definition of critical pedagogy by underscoring the everyday practices of resistance to hegemonic power relations (5). Daily resistance is important because one of the goals of critical pedagogy is to reveal and examine connections between daily life and structures of domination. A foundation of this work is Freire's conception of education as a subversive force. He advocated for "conscientization," or the unmasking of domination and mobilization for liberation, where all participants are "simultaneously teachers and students" (5). These projects answer Henry Giroux' call for working against despair by offering critique and possibilities, which is what utopian performatives do (6). People feel the possibility of a different and more just world.

While surveying the field of critical pedagogy, also known as critical education, I continued to encounter the work of Henry Giroux, such as *Pedagogy and The Politics of Hope Theory, Culture, And Schooling: A Critical Reader* and *On Critical Pedagogy*. Often considered a founder of critical pedagogy in the United States, Giroux's "Utopian Thinking in Dangerous Times: Critical Pedagogy and the Project of Educated Hope," a chapter in *Utopian Pedagogy*, is a call to action. He sees increased state control and surveillance since 11 September 2001, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the conflation of democracy with capitalism as a threat to civil liberties (Giroux, 26). "[S]truggles over political power, and democracy," he writes, "are inextricably linked to creation of public spheres where individuals can be educated as public agents, equipped with the skills, capacities, and knowledge needed to not only to perform as autonomous social agents but also to believe that such struggles are worth taking up" (28). For Giroux, education is the ultimate means of protecting democracy. He points to the importance of

civic education and critical pedagogy as keys to creating citizen activists because these methods focus on “creative flexibility, bridging the gap between learning and everyday life, making visible the connections between power and knowledge” (28). In the EGH project I experienced “creative flexibility” to bridge the gap between my life and my education through performance. The process of researching and observing made these new social connections possible, and devising and performing *Every Girl's a Hero* is how we made those connections visible. Although neither Giroux nor the EGH project gave me a clear path for sustaining these connections. Perhaps the knowledge I gained and visceral yet brief contact with utopia is the true connection that remains.

To pivot from my perspective as a student to my role as an educator I looked to the work of Monica Prendergast, particularly “From Guest to Witness: Teaching Audience Studies in Postsecondary Theatre Education” and “Utopian Performatives and the Social Imaginary: Toward a New Philosophy of Drama/Theater Education,” and her book, co-edited with Juliana Saxton, *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice*. In the first chapter, Saxton and Prendergast define terms such as popular theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, and community-based theater. They assert that they all fall within the scope of the umbrella term applied theater. These definitions clarified the various modes of applied theatre with which I am engaging in this study (Prendergast and Saxton 3–6).

In each of these forms the role of the audience is critical, or as Prendergast reminded us in “From Guest to Witness: Teaching Audience Studies in Postsecondary Theatre Education” audiences are not guests or visitors, but essential participants in the process and therefore are witnesses. She cites ancient Greek theatre and Commedia dell'arte, as well as Elizabethan and English Restoration theatre, as historical examples in which audiences were understood to be

“*witnesses* to these theatre rituals and storytelling that everyone understood to be part of the social/cultural (even political and/or religious practice) (Prendergast, "From Guest to Witness" 95). In all three of my case studies the audience was a crucial part of the performance and certain members had a key role in the development of the performance. In *Every Girl's a Hero*, the women of the EGH provided the raw material and were our priority as we devised the piece. Their approval of the final product meant we had “gotten it right” and truly understood them, or in the words of EGH Director, Ruth Herold, made them feel “H-S-L, Heard-Seen-Loved.” We needed them to witness what we had learned and the respect and love we felt toward their stories. Leigh Fondakowski and the performers of *The People's Temple* felt a similar motivation and obligation to Temple survivors and family members of the deceased, whose vulnerability and testimony made that play possible.

Prendergast defines witnessing as “an act of presence and testimony, of authentication and memory-making, of evidence and seeing. Witnesses are necessary, not extraneous, to the processes in which they are implicated; a witness in a theatre context is integral, not accidental” (95). This definition is most acutely exemplified by the interactions between Pussy Riot and the Mexican musicians who made #Freepussyriot México. By putting documentary evidence of their “crime” online and embedding it in their “Punk Prayer” music video, Pussy Riot asked the world to bear witness to their protest. Mexican musicians answered that call to action by recording an original song and video to demonstrate solidarity and understanding of the patriarchal and authoritarian rule both groups are resisting. In the words of Latina feminist Chela Sandoval, critical witnessing is “witnessing and being witnessed.” I assert that in this case the critical witnessing built and made visible a feminist activist network or diaspora (Aldama et al. 10).

Prendergast's "Utopian Performatives and the Social Imaginary: Toward a New Philosophy of Drama/Theater Education," illuminated the distinct features of drama/theatre education that make it an ideal breeding ground for utopian performatives. In this piece she brings together Charles Taylor's notion of the social imaginary with Jill Dolan's concept of utopian performatives by defining arts education as grounded in the "collective creation of socially imagined performative utopias" (Prendergast, "Utopian Performatives and the Social Imaginary" 59). This definition echoes the work of Pearl Damour, the company with whom we worked to devise *Every Girl's a Hero*, as they lay the groundwork for moments of socially imagined performative utopias that are created in concert with community partners. Their work aligns with Prendergast's assertion that dramatic education is a process that "embodies and defines socially committed moral values of active and engaged democracy and the protection and implementation of universal human rights" (59). Believing that everyone's story matters and can be artistic content is inherently democratic.

Prendergast also notes that "utopia for one person may be dystopia for another," and frames utopias and dystopias not as dichotomous but as opposite ends of a spectrum. She offers John Carey's distinction between utopia and dystopia. In *The Faber Book of Utopias*, Carey writes "To count as utopia an imaginary place must be an expression of desire. To count as dystopia, it must be an expression of fear" and reasons that, "[t]hose who construct utopias build on a universal longing" (Carey, in Prendergast, "Utopian Performatives and the Social Imaginary" 62). With this definition in mind, Prendergast suggests that dramatic depictions of utopia and dystopia express a longing for hope; both the idea and the practice. Citing the works of Ben Anderson and Ernst Bloch, she characterizes utopian explorations through theater as

manifestations of hope, or “an enactive process that arises from the articulation of desire for a better world” (63).

Prendergast defines community-based theater processes as offering “nontheater specialists the means of production to begin to locate and describe their own collective visions of a better world” (67). This notion is similar to Boal’s technique in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which asks participants to “alter as-is into what-if or not-yet” (67). Prendergast believes that working with such communities and in difficult circumstances offers greater potential to “create more moments of lucid intersubjective understanding between and amongst performers/spectators than a whole raft of mainstream theater experiences” (68).

Based on my experience with the EGH project, I agree with this assertion and note that the most impactful moments of the EGH project were ones Prendergast would describe as moments “when the established hierarchy and moral order is most closely questioned” (63). There were indeed instances when the socially imposed hierarchies between myself, as a graduate student, and the women of the EGH melted away. Such moments are meaningful because they give us a glimpse into the possible. To pursue change we must believe that change is possible.

Prendergast also espouses “open text, wherein students have to genuinely wrestle with a moral dilemma in which there is no foregone conclusion in ‘doing the right thing’” (67). As theatre-makers, we found that the challenge of devising was often the very fact that it is an open text, pregnant with possibilities and emotional and ethical pitfalls. Ideally students navigate this artistic terrain through a devising process,

within which whole group decisions mirror a kind of utopian existence wherein all voices are honored and heard as equal in import and all outcomes are provisional, open to broad interpretation and critical reflection and analysis, to conspectus, not consensus. (67)

Prendergast's quote accurately depicts the devising process used in the EGH project. There were moments of conflict and misunderstanding, but we took as a given that learning to work together was the best way to share an experience that was collective and aspirational. Sending one person off to write a script was never an option. Only through collective devising could we mirror the cooperation and community-building we witnessed at the EGH.

Prendergast asserts that through such pedagogical projects students can become "utopographers," or those who map out better worlds (69). Devising gives students the tools to operationalize their desire for a better world, and in so doing students learn to value that desire as more than wishful thinking. By acting on their desire for utopia students move away from the traditional notion of utopias as a fictional dream state but rather as a "critical attitude toward the present and a political commitment to experiment in transfiguring the coordinates of our historical moment" (Coté et al. 3). The goal of utopian pedagogy, like critical pedagogy, is not to impart predetermined knowledge but to ignite critical consciousness and action. Through this type of pedagogy, students, teachers, and community partners can socially imagine and investigate "how we got here and how we might get to where we are going" (69).

Prendergast cites Virginie Magnat's "Devising Utopia: Asking for the Moon" which appeared in a special edition of *Theatre Topics* that focused on devising. In this

article, Magnat echoes the utopian nature of devising by writing that it offers a “utopian dimension of collectively created work . . . through a desire to engage in a mutual endeavor whose goal is the active involvement of each participant in the overall process” (Magnat, in Prendergast, “Utopian Performatives and the Social Imaginary” 68).

Magnat’s description of devising highlights the democratic nature of the process that contradicts the more hierarchical structure of traditional theater roles, which places the playwright and the director as leaders of the artistic vision. Magnat supports devising in postsecondary education because students get to experience this more inclusive and utopian process. While I agree with these characterizations of the devising process and its potential rewards, neither piece addresses the role of community partners when devising is part of community based-performance. This is what I consider in Chapter One.

Magnat’s “Devising Utopia: Asking for the Moon,” traces the roots of devising from avant-garde theater groups of the 1960s including The Wooster Group, The Open Theatre, The Living Theatre, and Bread and Puppet Theatre. The goal of the collaborative and experimental works of those groups was to confront authority “through the creating of a ‘counterculture’” (Magnat 74). Contemporary devised theater, or what Magnat labels “postmodern devised theater” no longer “positions itself outside the dominant cultural formations” and in opposition to the traditional theatrical canon but instead seeks to offer “strategies of counter-hegemonic resistance” by proving new approaches to art making and living (74).

Magnat sees devising as a “third way,” not authoritarianism vs. democracy, but freedom to do various combinations (75). Devising is not the traditional hierarchical process where the director and playwright are the ultimate decision makers, and not one where all decisions are made collectively, but an interactive process that vacillates between group work and traditional

modes. An example is the final scene of the EGH piece. MFA student Tatiana Pavela, an accomplished actor and writer with experience devising, wrote a scene that utilized the superhero motif agreed upon by the group. She brought the scene in, and through performance and some improvisation the group worked with her to refine and further develop the scene. Perhaps this open-ended process can lead to pieces that are more open to audiences and more available for further development by the spectator?

In the words of Peggy Phelan, “Great art accumulates relevance and meaning as it moves beyond control of its creators” (Phelan, in Magnat 77). This is what happened with the EGH project. The magic of it didn’t occur until the audience entered it and they were able to do so because unlike an established play, it was their story told with many of their words. They felt authority to cheer, comment, and critique. Just as the devising process alters “traditional relations of power between director, playwright, actors, and spectators,” so does the product (77). The work comes together when it “feels” or “looks” right, as determined by consensus of the group of performers and confirmed by the audience.

The power of the utopian experience, whether it be through devising, the *convivencia* of being in community with civic partners, or the pockets of utopia created in performance, run throughout this study. My study would not be possible without the work of Jill Dolan, including her book *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* and the articles “Utopia in Performance” and “Performance, Utopia, and the "Utopian Performative." In her article “Utopia in Performance,” published in *Theatre Research International*, Dolan defines utopian performatives as “moments in performance when utopia is ‘done’ in the intensity of exchange between performers, spectators, and among audience” and “a process of feeling together over obvious differences, inspired by an intensely present moment of theatre” (Dolan, Utopia in

Performance 163). I see Dolan as queering the term utopia to reclaim it from any historical use. Therefore, utopian performatives are similar to Victor Turner's notion of *communitas*, or "the moment in the theatre event or ritual in which audiences feel themselves become part of a whole in an organic, nearly spiritual way" (165). Dolan describes this feeling as sparking a kind of secular faith that can inspire our politics and belief in the possibility of different kinds of social structures. "I believe that we can resignify 'faith' to progressive political ends," she writes, "and through the power of performance we can re-envision our social imaginary so that we might eventually *live* it as more humane, more loving, and more just" (164). Dolan makes clear that the "more humane, more loving, and more just" world she has experienced in performance aligns with her progressive politics.

I too have felt these moments in performance as both an actor and audience member. But before the EGH project I could not associate those moments with particular work done to build or prepare for the performance. The instances of deep intersubjective understanding I felt during the EGH project and particularly performing *Every Girl's a Hero* and in the post-show discussion, were born of the time and investment I had in the EGH community, or *convivencia*. In previous encounters with utopia performatives, I didn't have a way to act on this glimpse of a better world. Having established a relationship with the EGH and particularly its director Ruth Herold, I finally had a path to build on this feeling so that it could be more than a feeling. As a student and artist, the EGH project gave me the inspiration, the connection, and the sense of hope I needed to believe that I could make a difference.

Dolan explores hope as a key component of utopian performatives by considering the work of Marxist philosophers Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse, who see art as "an arena in which an alternative world can be expressed—not in a didactic, descriptive way as in traditional

‘utopian’ literature, but through the communication of an alternative experience” (Levitas in Dolan, "Utopia in Performance" 165). Again, Dolan’s foundation in Bloch points to a queering of the term to move it away from “didactic” or “traditional utopian literature” of the past. For both Dolan and Bloch, hope is born of the glimpse into a truly possible alternative and the rejection of everyday constraints.

José Esteban Muñoz, in his book *Cruising Utopia*, expands on Dolan’s concept of utopian performatives by framing it as a tool of queer futurity, which provides an escape from the prison of here and now. Queer futurity is a mode of queer critique that is “attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing the present,” by cruising “the field of visual and not so visual in an effort to see the anticipatory illumination of the utopian” (Muñoz 18). In other words, one can find utopia not just in performance but also in art and cultural practices, and these moments are not just feelings, but tools to see and enact utopia now. Muñoz defines queerness as “a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present,” or more succinctly, “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality” (1). By connecting queerness to utopia, Muñoz moves the notion of utopia from one strict definition to a playful and inventive mode that considers multiple possibilities and visions for the future. For Muñoz the taste of a better future that queerness provides is often accessed through aesthetics, particularly queer aesthetics. He asserts that various modes of queer performance and text, from the ornamental to the quotidian, enact queerness, or better versions of our world in the here and now.

Like Dolan, Muñoz engages with Ernst Bloch and his expanded idea of utopia that takes the concept beyond Thomas More’s idea of a fictional no-place. Bloch differentiates between abstract utopias, which function as critiques of the present and are “untethered to any historical

consciousness” and concrete utopias (2–3). Concrete utopias, on the other hand, are “relational to historically situated struggles,” and “the hopes of a collective” that exists in the “realm of educated hope” (3). Muñoz also uses the terms critical utopianism and critical idealism to designate these moments of utopia that express a historical consciousness and offer possibilities for change in the present (10). Utilizing critical utopianisms and critical idealism again moves utopia away from the historical baggage the term may carry. Through Bloch’s conception of “not-yet-here” one can combat the devastating idea that the present is fixed and unchangeable. The notion of concrete utopia showed me that the EGH project, *The People’s Temple*, and the videos by Pussy Riot and the #Freepussyriot México video were all creating pockets of utopia in the present. These utopian performatives were not fantasies, but real connections that can be foundations for the future.

Convivencia, as an *artista* and Latina feminist practice, shares Muñoz’s assertion that a better world can be enacted in the present. In her book *Chican@ Artivistas: Music, Community, and Transborder tactics in East Los Angeles*, Martha Gonzalez traces her work as a musician, activist, and scholar. Gonzalez defines *artista* as “more than a political identity but as the way in which we relate to our craft and, more specifically, how we apply our skill set in the context of a dominant capital market system” (Gonzalez 2). This definition aptly describes PearlDamour, Leigh Fondakowski, Pussy Riot, and my cohort of theatre students while working on the EGH project. In each case artists use their creativity and expertise to express their political identity within the dominant capitalist system. To combat the system that values individual productivity over community connection, Gonzalez writes,

Convivencia, stemming from the Spanish words *con* and *vivir*, or “to live with,” is the mindfulness of presence with others. Being present and engaging together in

mind, body, and spirit via participatory music and art practice, *convivencia* has become an invaluable code of ethics in *artivista* philosophy. (3)

This process-based and participatory approach to art production, community building, and activism values relationships and process over products.

Within all three of my case studies, I identify *convivencia* as both a methodology and a goal. As a methodology, *convivencia* requires individuals to spend time interacting with one another to conduct interviews and observations, devise works, and build a contextual understanding of the documentary elements being used. As a goal, the act of being together builds trust, rapport, and understanding. Even being together to witness the final piece of art and possibly discuss it, is *convivencia*. The EGH project succeeded because theatre students spent time working in the space, observing, and building rapport with staff and clients. Much of *The People's Temple* came from interviews that were more like conversations, where artists spent time with individuals to understand the context of their stories. Devising *The People's Temple* and *Every Girl's a Hero* required time together for theatre-makers to experiment and collectively examine their responses to the material. For Pussy Riot and the musicians of #Freepussyriot México, physically convening was not possible so the placing of their videos on the Internet for others to see and comment was their way of making *convivencia* happen. Gonzalez' chapter "The Big Frente Zapatista: Using Art as a Tool of Critical Dialogue," provides valuable insights into the Latina feminist connection to the Zapatista movement and its philosophy, which I discuss in detail in Chapter Three.

In her co-authored chapter "Women who Rock: Making Scenes, Building Communities: Convivencia and Archivist Praxis for a Digital Era" and her book *Loca Motion: The Travels of Chicana and Latina Popular Culture*, Michelle Habell-Pallán also details the use of *convivencia*

in Latina feminist thought, activism, and art making. Habell-Pallán provides examples of the kind of activist feminist diaspora I theorize in Chapter Three, which she calls a “transnational imaginary” based in “critical transnationalism” (*Loca Motion*, Habell-Pallán 3). I find the notion of a critical transnationalism helpful in recognizing the positive networks that can be forged by feminist activists even within the oppressive system of neoliberal globalization. She also considers hope and utopian potential of pop culture performance that celebrates the hybridity of Latinx identity and in so doing renders pop culture “subversive to the degree that it has hope for an America that has yet to live up to its democratic possibilities” (6).

Like borderlands performance studies, Habell-Pallán offers an example of bridging the fields of queer studies, performance studies, and Latinx studies/Latina feminism (9). I see this dissertation as working in that tradition. In the pages that follow I build a bridge between documentary performance as a vehicle for utopian performatives with the ultimate goal of *convivencia*. Each of these case studies highlights hope and being in community as radical acts of resistance, restoration, and transformation.

Methodologies

As a performance studies scholar and Latina feminist, my methods come from both realms. I choose methods that are appropriate to the case study at hand. For example, in Chapter One, I examine a project involving both the University of Washington School of Drama and the EGH. Given the community partnership at play here, I utilize the concept of community-based performance (CBP) as theorized and practiced by Jan Cohen-Cruz. Cohen-Cruz defines CBP as artistic partnerships with community members or organizations with the goal of constructing a performance piece that celebrates the community and/or addresses their issues (Cohen-Cruz 13).

On the other hand, PaR, which is also referred to by other names, including participatory action research and community-engaged research, is work done primarily to pursue performance scholarship. Utilized by scholars such as Baz Kershaw and Mark Fleishman, PaR is research done by means of performance, utilizing performance methods, where the results are presented through performance (Fleishman 28). I chose to analyze the EGH project through these two lenses because it shared characteristics with both CBP and PaR. Because I am interested in process and pedagogy as well as the final project, I do not use thick description to reply the details of the culminated piece, *Every Girls a Hero*, as I do in Chapter Three.

During the EGH project, School of Drama students, myself included, used the tools of performance ethnography such as participant observations and interviews to generate raw material for *Every Girl's a Hero*. Performance ethnography is a category of embodied research that includes PaR. Scholars and practitioners of performance ethnography include D. Soyini Madison (Madison 2012), E. Patrick Johnson (Johnson 2012), and Joni Jones (Jones 2002). Each translates their ethnographic fieldwork into performance. Similarly, through work exchange hours, or volunteer work that acculturates the artist to the environment and facilitates dialogic sharing, students engaged in the EGH project were able to learn about EGH, observe the organization, and eventually interview clients and staff (Duffly 286). That field work was then translated into our devised performance piece, *Every Girl's a Hero*. Therefore, the EGH project was a hybrid of performance ethnography, PaR, and CBP, so analyzing the project through these three frameworks is the most appropriate methodology.

In Chapter Two, I examine a work of documentary theatre, *The People's Temple*. For this piece I traveled to Berkeley, California to access production records about the creation of this commissioned play, its premiere at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, and the production's limited

tour. I also conducted interviews with those involved in the inaugural production, including head writer and director Leigh Fondakowski, as well as cast members Velina Brown and Margo Hall. Again, I am studying both the process of creating the piece, the piece itself, as well as its reception. Therefore, I do not use thick-description to convey the performance of the play. Instead, I employ text analysis of the playscript to ascertain what audience members may have seen and heard. Additionally, I used on-line performance reviews, to track the life and reception of the play beyond its initial production.

I assert that the play itself is a form of performative historiography, so I have applied this framework as articulated by performance scholar Scott Magelssen and film scholar Anna Siomopoulos. Both use performative historiography to describe performances that destabilize accepted texts or historiography and reanimate reception by utilizing multiple voices and perspectives (Siomopoulos and Zimmerman 11). Through performance, historical events are revisited and complicated by new or forgotten information. The definition of performative historiography perfectly matches the intentions and, I argue, the results of *The People's Temple*.

For Chapter Three I employ borderlands performance studies, thick description, and material semiotics. Borderlands performance studies is a form of performance studies that specifically analyzes decolonizing performances, also known as “decolonizing performatives,” or “perform antics” (Aldama et al. 6). I contend that the videos created by Pussy Riot and a group of Mexican musicians are decolonizing acts because they express solidarity and build networks that transcend geopolitical borders. Given the visual nature of the documents, I employ thick description, as theorized and applied by Clifford Geertz and Gilbert Ryle (Geertz 6). Thick descriptions are extremely detailed accounts of places, people, and actions that offer context as well as subjective interpretations of meaning to add value to the collected data (9–10). At the end

of the chapter, I combine thick description with Ric Knowles' method of material semiotics. Knowles uses this method to analyze live performances as an entire experience by considering several factors including the conditions of reception and performance text itself (Knowles 18–21). Here I am not as concerned with the process of creating the pieces but rather the visual message they convey. For these reasons thick description and material semiotics are appropriate for this case study.

Context and Positionality

As I am employing an auto-ethnographic approach to this case study in the first chapter and examine my own documentary performance piece in the conclusion, it is necessary that I share some details about myself. Documentary performance projects often require a personal immersion within a topic or community, and as such an awareness of my positionality is paramount. I come to this work from a position of both privilege and marginalization. As a forty-something woman of color, I encounter the performance of power and difference daily. My sheltered upbringing in a middle-class suburb was mitigated by my awareness that my family was different. My father illegally immigrated to the US from Mexico, married a US citizen, and raised a family in an English-only household. He never spoke his native language in our home, for fear my siblings and I would learn to speak English with a Spanish accent. For him, his accent added to a performance of otherness that belied his status as a naturalized citizen. Therefore, like many children of immigrants, I was raised with the subliminal message that I must assimilate and, in so doing, sacrifice my native language and culture. My mother's Latinx and Native American roots and her upbringing in poverty, marked by domestic violence and alcoholism, were ever-present reminders that we were not like our fellow suburbanites.

Alongside this marginalized identity, I inhabit a position of privilege by virtue not only of a stable suburban upbringing, but also by my undergraduate and graduate education at highly respected universities. I have never been homeless or struggled with food insecurity.

Now, as a graduate student attending a large public university, I seek to use both my position of privilege and my marginalized identities to co-create art with community partners through documentary performance. As an artist/researcher, I am drawn to community-engaged projects as a means of exploring the performance of identity, power, and privilege, and investigating models of social connection that resist or at least trouble normative paradigms. In other words, I study how to build community and share, celebrate, and reclaim cultural identity through performance. I joined my PhD program after two decades as a professional actor, educator, and public speaking consultant, and was eager to pursue research at the intersection of theory and practice, or praxis. To that end I have also earned a certificate in public scholarship, or what some call community-engaged scholarship, or community-based participatory research. These methodologies challenge scholars to work in partnership with community members, and in so doing encourage them to face the societal structures that impact the community. My commitment to ethical community collaborations and enacting a more just social structure forces me to approach documentary performance not as a panacea, but as an apparatus for these goals that must be continually practiced and scrutinized. Given my commitment to utilizing my art practice and scholarship toward activism based in larger collective aims, I use the Latina feminist term *artista* to describe myself and those who also fuse art and activism toward communal ends (Habell-Pallán et al. 77).

Description of Case Studies/Organization of Chapters

I begin by detailing my own experience on the EGH project and the utopian potential of community-based performance, PaR, performance ethnography, and devising in Chapter One. While the project offered invaluable glimpses of a better and more just world, I also point to flaws in a process that was not flexible enough to ensure a truly reciprocal relationship with our community partners. Additionally, I consider the pedagogical impacts of community-based arts projects and their potential as forms of critical and utopian pedagogy. This chapter explores the role of documentary performance, utopian performatives, and *convivencia* on a local and even personal level in an attempt to address the trauma of homelessness.

In Chapter Two I widen the scope of documentary performance by investigating a documentary play, *The People's Temple*, which I argue addressed community trauma on a regional and national level. In addition to generating deferred conversations about the mass murder/suicide in Jonestown as a form of performative historiography, I contend that it successfully destabilized the accepted narrative of the event. By utilizing both the archive, through interviews and documents, and the repertoire, through music, the play performed a kind of queer curation by juxtaposing the joyous life and terrifying death of this community. Through devising and moment work, the lead writer and director Leigh Fondakowski guided her fellow artists on a collaborative exploration that I categorize as a feminist mode of art making. Most importantly the play produced moments of healing for Jonestown survivors, family members, and a community that never came to terms with the deception of Jim Jones.

For Chapter Three I consider documentary performance on a global scale through the use of videos posted on the Internet. Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" music video and the video documenting their protest performance in Christ the Saviour Cathedral circulated internationally

and spoke to like-minded feminist activists. The #Freepussyriot México video was an act of solidarity by Mexican musicians who shared Pussy Riot's anti-authoritarian mission. Through documentary performance, images were used to speak visually across borders and despite language barriers. Makers of #Freepussyriot México saw in Pussy Riot's videos images they would repeat in their own Mexican context, resulting in a global exchange, or what I am calling a feminist activist diaspora. These images tapped into a rich history of Mexican feminist activism.

To close my argument on documentary performance, I conclude with my collaboration with Dr. Sara Freeman on *Start All Over: A Tacoma Civil Rights Performance Walk*. In this community-engaged performance piece I applied what I have learned from the three previous case studies. Since I began with a local case study it is only fitting that I conclude with one. While my work on the EGH project was as a student, the performance walk was a chance to work as an artist, educator, and engaged-community member. I then end the conclusion chapter with my final thoughts on the three case studies and my continued admiration for the utopian power for documentary performance and *convivencia*.

Chapter One: Documentary Performance as Utopian Pedagogy

In my long-lived experiences in both theater and drama education, it is those moments when the established hierarchy and moral order is most closely questioned, even threatened, that catharsis happens, that utopian performatives happen, and that learning (even enlightenment!) happens.

Monica Prendergast

“Utopian Performatives and the Social Imaginary:

Toward a New Philosophy of Drama/Theater Education,” 67

Introduction

In the post-show discussion of *Every Girl's a Hero*, a devised piece created from interviews and observations during our year-long collaboration with the women of a local day shelter, I explained why my fellow actors and I portrayed these women as superheroes. “We were amazed at the stories we heard.” I stated. “I everyday wondered, would I be that strong?” An audience member, who was also a client of the shelter, stood up and reassured me, “You would. Because you’d have sisters behind you” (*Every Girl's A Hero Post-Show Discussion*). I was a graduate student and volunteer at a shelter with the luxury of going home each night, and this woman broke through that power dynamic to support me. That moment seemed to crystalize the value of this experience for both of us. We were no longer strangers but fellow community members who, if only for this brief moment, comforted and supported each other. For an instant I felt a different social structure at work and found a new way of being connected to this person. This connection offered me a glimpse of what a more equitable world would *feel* like.

Of course, once that moment passed and I returned to my life as theater student, the structures that reinforce institutionalized classism and power imbalance reasserted themselves. I am therefore concerned about the ethics of performance projects like ours that can be driven by a philanthropic impulse without the structure or institutional support to turn moments of connection into real change. Jill Dolan has identified these moments of hope, or a glimpse of a more just world, as utopian performatives” (Dolan, “Performance, Utopia, and the ‘Utopian Performative’” 455). Jose Esteban Muñoz has taken utopian performatives a step further to consider how individuals can tactically use such moments to create pockets of utopia in the here and now, or what he calls queer futurity (Muñoz 18). His queering of the term opens it up to the possibility that there are many versions of utopia. Monica Prendergast considers the experience of utopian performatives as key to the transformative potential of arts education (Prendergast, 63). As I note in this chapter and the ones that follow, documentary performance gives us the ability to explore both utopia and dystopia by imagining and at times enacting different worlds. I see documentary performance and its associated methodologies of devising and performance ethnography as manifestations of women of color and Latina feminist thought, which advocates for collectivity over hierarchy, values testimony and lived experiences, questions established modes of meaning making, and compels analysis of power relations in order to transform them. (Habell-Pallán et al.,68-69). By using the world as it is to create performances that challenge dominant paradigms and facilitate an embodied experience of hope, documentary and devised works offer a fertile ground for utopian performatives.

Since the completion of *Every Girl's a Hero*, I have wondered how I might categorize, analyze, and comprehend this embodied research experience in order to ascertain a repeatable feminist pedagogical model for use in higher education. As I am concerned with the process of

devising and producing a community-engaged piece as well as the community-building and pedagogical applications of the work, I will spend less time describing the final performance piece, *Every Girl's a Hero*. In this chapter, I first explore where this project lies on a spectrum of community participation, with Performance as Research (PaR), work done to pursue performance scholarship, on one end and Community-Based Performance (CBP), or artistic collaborations that promote community building, on the other. In so doing, I will highlight ethical issues that arise, particularly in a university setting, when deciding where on the spectrum of community-engagement a project should live. Second, I examine how these forms of embodied research can be vehicles for critical and utopian pedagogy and feminist thought by training theatre artists to produce community-generated devised pieces that explore stories and circumstances of lived-experiences. In fact, because “the real,” or the material world plays a key role in these projects, I consider this type of performance part of the expansive definition of documentary performance I offered in my introduction. For my purposes I am assigning the term “documentary performance” to works that draw on real-life stories and incidents as the primary source for artistic material and inspiration. Finally, I close this chapter with a discussion of how this type of documentary performance provides a fertile ground for utopian performatives, or intense moments that “reach for something better, for new ideas about how to be and how to be with each other” (Dolan, “Performance, Utopia, and the ‘Utopian Performative’” 455). I assert that utopian performatives are in fact the most valuable aspect of these collaborations because they create a glimpse into a more interconnected and just society. Utilizing participant observations as well as post-production interviews, my ultimate goal is to identify women of color/Latina feminist pedagogical mode that forges new connections and alternative societal

structures between universities and community organizations; an imagined scaffolding that could, over time, yield more equitable civic relationship.

Skies Over Seattle and the EGH Project

In spring 2015, approximately forty MFA and undergraduate students from the University of Washington School of Drama and I embarked on a yearlong community-based performance project. Our guides through the endeavor were award-winning performance duo PearlDamour (Director Katie Pearl and Pulitzer-honoree playwright Lisa D'Amour) and their associate Ashley Sparks. While the project was originally conceived for MFA and undergraduate students, I, the only doctoral student in the group, was invited to participate due to my scholarly interest in documentary performance and public scholarship.

We were charged with observing and building a relationship with an organization in the community surrounding our university, the University District (or the U District as it is commonly known), and then devising a performance piece reflecting that community back to itself. While the neighborhood is home to individuals of varied socioeconomic standing, this project evolved to focus on adults and teens experiencing homelessness as well as intravenous drug users living in the U District and the service organizations addressing their needs. The three organizations with whom students voted to work were the Elizabeth Gregory Home (EGH), a drop-in day shelter and transitional housing facility for women experiencing homelessness; ROOTS (Rising Out of the Shadows), a young adult overnight shelter; and The People's Harm Reduction Alliance, a peer-run organization that promotes safer drug use through a needle distribution program, known colloquially as the Needle Exchange. My cohort worked exclusively with the EGH. Each cohort performed their devised piece for their community partner in their location. Then the three pieces were woven together into a play titled *Skies Over*

Seattle and performed for the public in a conventional theater space. The larger U District project will hereafter be referred to as *Skies over Seattle*, while the work my cohort did will be referred to as the EGH project.

The University District is a mixed retail and residential area and one of the oldest neighborhoods in Seattle, Washington. The U District covers 1.948 square miles and as of 2019 is home to 31,151 residents who experience a population density of 15,991 residents per square mile versus the Seattle average which is 8,986 per square mile (city-data.com). The ethnic makeup is 46.9% White, 32.2% Asian, 5.8% Hispanic or Latino, 3.3% African American, and 1.1% American Indian, .4% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (city-data.com). As of 2018 the median household income was \$11,404 versus \$65,277 citywide (seattle.gov). In the district 60.3% of residents have a Bachelor's degrees or higher which is greater than the citywide average of 57% (seattle.gov). Unemployment is 16.9%, also higher than the citywide average of 7% (seattle.gov). People of color make up 43.2% of the population as opposed to the citywide average of 33% (seattle.gov). Twenty-six different languages are spoken in the district with Cantonese and Mandarin being the most prevalent (seattle.gov). Therefore, this neighborhood has a higher population density, is more diverse, better educated, and has a lower household income with greater instances of unemployment.

A recent influx of tech industry workers, newly and more densely constructed housing, rising property values, and pressures of gentrification threaten to displace the local populations that have lived in the U District for generations. Data from Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Census Bureau's show that between 2009 and 2019 Seattle rents have increased 92% since 2019 (KIRO 7 News Seattle). But in the same ten-year period the median income in the city has only increased by 46.9% (KIRO 7 News Seattle). Due to these factors,

university students often struggle to find affordable housing in the area and have witnessed a proliferation of homeless encampments as many unsheltered people convene to access services. The Ave, the nickname for University Way, the main street that runs through the neighborhood, includes businesses common to large college towns such as used bookstores, tattoo parlors, record stores, and smoke shops. While community anchors occupy some storefronts, others have new renters every few months.

Project Goals

Katie Pearl of PearlDamour recalled in my interview with her that the School of Drama proposed the collaboration in order to “connect students to the community” (Pearl Interview 2019). She went on to state “[T] here was this sense that the University of Washington was in the U district, but especially the MFA students never left campus” (Pearl Interview 2019). In addition to exposing students to the larger community, Pearl cites a pedagogical goal as well: “I think there's an awareness that the professional theatre world is changing, that there's a need for graduating students of MFA programs to have experience in creating devised, ensemble-generated work” (Pearl Interview 2019). Lastly, Pearl identifies a third goal centered on community building, or in her words a “desire to de-rarefy the theater experience” (Pearl Interview 2019). She asks, “How as theatre artists are we participating in our communities? And might that be the beginning; planting the seeds of a longer relationship for the Drama School and different community organizations?” (Pearl Interview 2019).

Early practitioners of service learning and community engagement cite “critical reflection” as the necessary component for moving civic action beyond the realm of volunteerism (Dolgon et al. 3). The objective of this critical reflection is to assess the intention

versus impact of this project on students and our community partners and in so doing learn lessons that can be applied to university and community collaborations in the future. I interrogate the EGH project to assess the implementation and impacts of what PearlDamour called a community-engagement experiment.

To that end, naming the three goals of the project—exposure to the larger community, artistic skill building for students, and generating art for and with community partners to “plant seeds for a longer relationship”—provides benchmarks by which I can evaluate its efficacy. Moreover, these distinct aims lend themselves to embodied practices with disparate methods and objectives. The first two aims, awareness and appreciation of the U District beyond the campus boundaries and arming arts practitioners with tools for devising ensemble-based work, can be achieved through Performance as Research (PaR), also known as Practice as Research in Performance (PARIP), or Practice Based Research (PBR) (*Parip/Practice as Research in Performance*). PaR is an umbrella term for embodied research such as performance ethnography, which usually takes the form of participant observations and interviews. Materials generated from these methods can then be used by scholar-practitioners to create a theatrical piece that examines an idea, a question, or a particular society.

Baz Kershaw defines PaR as “the use of practical creativity as reflexive enquiry into significant research concerns (usually conducted by artist/scholars in universities)” and as “methods and methodologies in search of results across disciplines: a collection of *transdisciplinary* research ‘tools’” (Riley and Hunter 4). Mark Fleishman, member of the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR) Performance as Research Working Group, further defines PaR as “research that is carried out through or by means of performance, using methodologies and specific methods familiar to performance practitioners, and where the output

is at least in part, if not entirely, presented through performance” (Fleishman 28). Similar to Diana Taylor, who calls for the archive (written word) and repertoire (embodied act) to work in concert to produce more complete and nuanced epistemological experiences, Fleishman frames PaR as different from other research methods because it opens up “new ways of thinking and new subjects for exploration that traditional scholarship does not or cannot gain purchase on” (29). In other words, practitioners apply the tools of performance such as speaking, listening, questioning, relationship-building, and personal reflection—all tools that transcend various disciplines but are particularly salient in performance—to conduct research. These performance skills are also key to analyzing, synthesizing, and sharing research results.

More specifically than PaR, I conclude that the EGH project was primarily a work of performance ethnography, a form of research and cultural exchange practiced by artists and scholars such as D. Soyini Madison (Madison 2012), E. Patrick Johnson (Johnson 2012), and Joni Jones (Jones 2002). Jones writes, “Performance ethnography translates fieldwork experiences into performances among the researchers, artifacts from field work, and audiences” (7). Our performance was an attempt to translate and share our field research conducted through interviews and observations while working at the EGH. Although our performance was a work of art meant to entertain, its main purpose was to “explore bodily knowing,” and “share knowledge of culture” (J. L. Jones, “Performance Ethnography” 7). While PearlDamour never used the term “performance ethnography” to describe the project, I am characterizing it as such because our questions did not involve a specific intervention but were instead an exploration. We were not interested in what the neighborhood could or should be, but in the ever changing now of this place. This was a crucial stance to avoid the “missionary” dynamic, in which a well-intentioned but naïve benefactor dictates outcomes or material benefits.

PaR does not address the third objective of the PearlDamour/UW School of Drama collaboration: community building. PaR is conducted for the edification of the practitioner, so while community building may be a byproduct; it is not the primary purpose. For theatre practitioners, community-based performance is often the method to achieve community-building. Community-based theatre or community-based performance (CBP) occurs when professional artists partner with community members to create a performance that addresses a topic of concern to that community.

While PearlDamour did not set out to create a project to fit a strict definition of CBP, I still find it instructive to point out the moments where CBP tactics were and were not employed. CBP benefits from the skills and talents of trained artists and the local insights of community performers. Through the collaboration, artistic techniques are used to amplify and share particular issues and in the process all participants (professional and amateur) build relationships and understanding. Scholar and practitioner Jan-Cohen Cruz describes CBP as “social doing in one’s particular corner of the world and an artistic framing of that doing for others to appreciate” (Cohen-Cruz 13). Therefore, this method of embodied research foregrounds the local as well as mutual benefits, or reciprocity for all involved, over the research objectives of the scholar-practitioner.

PearlDamour: Ethics and Aesthetics

During their project with the School of Drama, Katie Pearl and Lisa D’Amour were completing their own hybrid performance ethnography and community-based project called *Milton*. Working with five towns named Milton in Massachusetts, North Carolina, Louisiana, Oregon, and Wisconsin, they attempted to address the question, “What does it mean to be an

American?” They describe their inspiration as “traveling to towns we’d never need to go to and talking to people we’d never have a reason to meet” (*Milton*, PearlDamour). In each location they used interviews with residents to produce a theatrical piece for the town. While residents did not perform in the devised piece, local musicians in each city provided “opening acts” for the show (Pearl Interview 2019). To facilitate deeper community engagement and a lasting impact, PearlDamour also worked with community members to develop a civic event in conjunction with their performance. In Milton, Massachusetts, the community chose to host *Courageous Conversations* (“Courageous Conversations Toward Racial Justice”), a series of civic dialogues on race; while in Milton, North Carolina the town produced a street fair (“Milton Street Fair”). Both of these events continue to this day. Katie Pearl described their performance in each location as “context for the community collaboration” and “the community collaboration as context for the performance” (Pearl Interview 2019). The series of events created an “ecosystem of reflection, conversations, celebration, and excavation” (Pearl Interview 2019). Therefore, PearlDamour’s goal for the School of Drama partnership was “to bring the ethics and aesthetics of the Milton project to this experience” and to see if *Milton* could “provide a template in any way for this work to continue. How can *Milton* serve the theater community beyond its initial life?” (Pearl Interview 2019).

With the sensibilities of *Milton* as their model, PearlDamour invited the student participants of *Skies Over Seattle* to spend time serving their community organizations in order to build rapport, observe the culture, and then to reciprocate that hospitality with an aesthetically compelling performance piece. In *Milton*, PearlDamour wanted to produce theatrical pieces that required the skills of trained performers, so they chose not to include community performers. That model was also used in the *Skies Over Seattle* partnership, and only theater students would

perform on stage. This decision came from a desire to create a performance piece with high artistic value but also to mitigate the logistical challenges of fitting community performers into a traditional production timeline. Excluding our community partners had the unfortunate effect of leaving us to speak for them rather than collaborating with them. They were the source material for the devised performance but were not involved in the devising. Fashioning a more inclusive creative process would have been possible had we reimaged the traditional framework for producing a performance piece. Not altering the production process to fit the needs for our community partner points to a deeper shortcoming—in practice, we were not truly viewing them as artistic partners and collaborators.

Project Description

Every Girl's a Hero, the culminating devised piece from my cohort, was specifically about and for the EGH community, which aligns with the aims of PaR and specifically performance ethnography. This collage of scripted scenes and movement pieces, interspersed with audio and video recordings, told the fictional story of a woman coming to the EGH. Through a deconstructed chronology, the audience learns that this woman has left an abusive relationship and her children. Her journey starts outside the doors of the EGH, where she stands in the rain and dresses in clothes others have discarded. Eventually she enters the EGH, tells her story, and works in the kitchen to feed the literal superheroes she meets there, who happen to also be women experiencing homelessness.

These characters were composites of the EGH staff and clients and were developed using their responses to the question, “If you could have a superpower, what would it be?” The superheroes included *The Genie*, who grants a limited number of wishes a day, such as providing

warm blankets and fresh produce; *The Jaguar*, a tough woman who protects all the women; *The PhD*, a highly intelligent woman who lost her “secure” government job and now uses her brainpower to turn everyday items into much needed resources. The protagonist’s story culminates while under the tutelage of these heroines, as she becomes *The Siren*, a woman who cannot be silenced and whose beautiful singing voice can overpower others (Pearl).

Every Girl’s a Hero was performed once on site at the EGH in mid-May, and then as part of *Skies Over Seattle*. *Skies* took place in The Floyd and Delores Jones Playhouse Theater in the U District and ran for two evening performances and one Sunday matinee. All performances were free, open to the public, and attended by a mix of staff and clients from our partner organizations as well as theatergoers with no connection to the project. Post-show discussions followed each night of *Skies* and the one-time performance of *Every Girl’s a Hero* at the EGH.

This project can be placed on a spectrum somewhere between PaR on one end and CBP on the other. As a form of PaR, theater students used the technique of performance ethnography, such as interviews and participant observations, to research this community. But unlike PaR the end result of the research was a theatrical offering performed for the community partners and allowed for community critique through a post-show discussion. These aspects are a hallmark of CBP. Scholar and CBP practitioner Richard Owen Greer asserts that CBP productions must be “of the people, by the people, and for the people” (Cohen-Cruz 2). More specifically, Jan Cohen Cruz cites Du Bois’ Krigwa Theater as epitomizing “the balancing of arts and activism familiar in community-based performance” (22). In *The Crisis Magazine*, W.E.B. Du Bois outlined his “criteria” for a theatre that would serve the black community, stating that it must be “About us . . . By us . . . Near us” (Du Bois 134). Applying these criteria to *Every Girl’s a Hero* reveals some of the mixed agenda for this project. The production was arguably for, about, and near the

women of the EGH, yet it was presented both in and outside their physical space for a heterogeneous audience. Therefore, the question of authorship and ownership of the work is a complex one, which I will examine by sharing the devising process in more detail.

Devising Process

The devising process began in the vein of PaR with ethnographic research. As residents of the U District, my fellow students and I began by examining our own relationship to as well as our place in this shared space. Therefore, early in the process, PearlDamour associate Ashley Sparks and I arranged meetings with ten U District organizations including churches, local businesses, a student-athlete study center, and the Needle Exchange. While we knew we would only be able to partner with three groups for *Skies Over Seattle*, we wanted to interact with a variety of U District constituents. Doing so proved to be a critical component of our research and devising process. Encountering the amalgam that is the U District, including the over one-hundred-year-old wooden schoolhouse turned community center, the occult book and gift store, and the many frozen yogurt shops, troubled our assumption of the homogeneity of the local community. We came to view the area as a network activated by the heterogeneous residents of this shared site, or in the words of Helen Nicholson, it gave us an understanding of the community as a “messy imprecise place” (Duffly 285). Our embodied experience was useful in fostering knowledge of our own privilege and a more nuanced understanding of living in extreme poverty amid plenty. Sharing our newfound insights on these inequities as well our own positionality with our community partners could have turned our ethnographic research into the type of dialogic exchange one finds in CBP. Unfortunately, we did not do this, which is another reason our project existed in a space between PaR and CBP.

Instead of discussing our observations with the women of EGH, we wrote about and examined these insights during the devising process and inserted moments that highlighted the unequal distribution of wealth in our neighborhood. Although as students we lived and worked in the U District, there was a context of the local community that we did not access in our daily lives due to our level of enfranchisement and privilege. Sidewalks dotted with groups of unsheltered youth, often the same age as the undergraduates in our group, stood in stark relief to the picturesque university campus, the base of operations for one of the largest employers in the state (“Economic Basics” *Economic Development Council of Seattle & King County*).

Ironically, the student residents of this neighborhood are often more transient than the homeless population, who are permanent residents and navigate the city as such. Due to our transience—because we have the means to participate and leave the community at will—we exist outside the social structures at work in this community. Our outsider status presents both the constraint of never truly understanding the lives of the EGH women and the opportunity to provide a platform for the stories these women wanted to share.

Early in the process, EGH Executive Director Ruth Herold stated that the women she worked with wanted to share their stories and were tired of being “invisible” in our city. As we spoke with and eventually interviewed EGH clients, the desire to be seen and heard was a recurring sentiment. Herold describes the immediate impact of our performance as such:

When I was in grad school, we had a professor who talked about the importance of being H-S-L, which is the Heard, Seen, and Loved. I think at your performance, that’s what they experienced. Many were in tears; just that feeling of being seen was so beautiful. There were a number of you that were in tears as well. That kind of experience, it’s just not something that folks get every day.

(Herold Interview 2019)

Perhaps the reason the women of EGH felt HSL was because we spent time working in their community for months prior to devising our play. During our yearlong collaboration, the actual devising process, which included interviewing EGH clients and evening rehearsals, did not happen until the final three months of the project. Prior to this, we spent the first two quarters of the academic year (Fall 2015 and Winter 2016) fulfilling volunteer or “work exchange” hours at EGH. Catherine Ming Duffly designates work exchange “as a dialogic, sharing process” that acculturates artists to their new surroundings while simultaneously calling attention to their status as outsiders (286). I use the term here to highlight the reciprocal nature of our work at EGH.

Katie Pearl describes the methodology of *Skies Over Seattle* by stating, “[T]he research and development for this project is just about spending time in the community, it’s just about volunteering, it’s just about not actually leading with your art making, but leading with just being a human being” (Pearl Interview 2019). Pearl’s notion of “spending time in the community” as signature methodology is similar to the feminist of color concept of *convivencia*, which literally means *coexist* in Spanish. *Convivencia* is the “deliberate convening [that] builds community, creates a context for social justice work, and inspires new forms of knowledge” (Habell-Pallán et al. 68). Latina feminist scholar Martha Gonzalez describes *convivencia* as a key methodology to her *artivista* praxis which values “living process over finite product” (68). *Artivista* projects “fuse together artistic and activist practices within larger collective endeavors to build relationships and create community” (71). I see the EGH project as an *artivista* project that utilized *convivencia* through our work exchange shifts. Therefore, while the tasks we completed—such as washing dishes, cutting vegetables, making pancakes, and unloading boxes,

may have aided the EGH in the moment, doing so alongside EGH clients and staff benefited us, as we were able learn about the community, and, in the process, they learned about us.

Upon completing a work exchange shift, we would write a reflection of our experience and post that reflection on a shared directory for Katie Pearl, Lisa D'Amour, Ashley Sparks and our fellow group members to see. In some instances, a fellow team member would interview us after a shift and produce a written summary. We did not share these impressions with the women of the EGH nor did we set up a mechanism by which they could express their thoughts about interacting with us. Without this type of dialogic exchange, the women were in essence objects of our study rather than collaborators. Had we created space for dialogue we could have built a more equitable relationship and gained a deeper sense of the impact we were having on each other.

By the winter quarter of 2016 we began to feel less like outsiders at the EGH. We now knew peoples' names, their position in the community (e.g., staff, client, or volunteer), and a bit about their backgrounds. Michael Monicatti, an undergraduate Drama student who worked on the EGH project, described this subtle shift by stating:

I knew where things were and I knew who on staff to go to for stuff . . . before then I didn't feel confident taking up space. And with that confidence I was able to strike up conversations to begin to foster relationships with clients. Me gathering my bearings helped me. Being ready to approach people casually instead of in any kind of formal structure that was present when we first started with the PearlDamour workshops and moving away from that was something that was more

process-oriented than product-oriented. I was talking to people instead of looking for certain answers to certain questions. (Monicatti Interview)

As Monicatti describes, we may not have been full-fledged members of the community because we had homes to return to each night, but we were able to navigate the EGH space without asking for help and had familiar tasks to attend to as soon as we arrived. It was at this point that we began to record interviews during our shifts. We explained to the clients and staff of the EGH that we were creating a play inspired by their stories and the EGH in general yet would not use anyone's name in the piece. While we always asked permission to record an interview, we did not ask interviewees to sign consent forms. In retrospect, this was a failure on our part and another step that could have contributed toward redistributing the balance of power between our community partner and us.

According to Ruth Herold, she asked the women at several group meetings about having us in their space. Those who were present agreed; yet due to the drop-in nature of the EGH she states that having “the same people come five times in a row would be a miracle” (Herold Interview 2019). Therefore, she appreciated that we got consent from interviewees after months of working side-by-side with them. Herold observed, “the fact that you all were willing to go in and roll your sleeves up and do things with people . . . I think that was an effective way of getting consent in a[n] authentic way.” (Herold Interview 2019). Spending months building rapport and trust with the community was a byproduct of our *convivencia* or “the deliberate act of being with each other and being present to each” (Habell-Pallán et al. 71). Feminists of color utilize *convivencia* to resist the social alienation inherent in societal structures, and in this instance it was successful. Additionally, we created composite characters so that no one person was singled out, and the EGH clients reported that they enjoyed seeing elements of their stories

performed.

In our periodic evening and weekend workshops with PearlDamour, we used our interviews, observations, and outside research to begin our devising. Members of PearlDamour often led guided meditations, writing exercises, or discussions of assigned readings including *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* (McIntosh); excerpts from *Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (Lakoff); and *Invitation to the Party: Building Bridges to the Arts, Culture and Community* (Walker-Kuhne). We also participated in group activities such as a privilege line, where students stepped forward or moved back in response to statements of privilege or marginalization that describe their lives. In the final stages of the devising process, we met in our teams every Saturday of the Spring 2016 quarter without PearlDamour. In these sessions, members of our group took turns leading exercises such as improvisation or Viewpoints. Sessions always began with each member “checking in” by giving an update on their state of mind, and “checking out” at the end of the session. Our group completed each of these student-led devising sessions by also voting on what should be accomplished and who would lead the next rehearsal. These sessions were held on the University of Washington campus, not at the EGH, as it was closed on Saturdays, and we did not invite the women of the EGH to participate in these sessions. I now can see ways we could have brought our devising into their space. We could have asked the women to suggest music, props, clothing, and other items that represented the EGH.

Our rehearsals became a laboratory to test ideas and encounter happy accidents. For example, while watching video-recorded interviews of EGH clients and staff, an actor began changing her clothes near where the images were being projected. We were all surprised and moved when part of the projection showed up on her back. Since clothing and blankets were

precious items often used to express care at the EGH, we found that projecting images on these surfaces brought to life their symbolic meaning. Projecting women's faces on set pieces and textiles and playing their recorded voices created the recurring motif of community building through small acts of kindness—like putting a blanket on someone or just acknowledging their presence.

While observing and gathering information, performance ethnographers must work through some of the “ethical and political dilemmas of fieldwork and representation” (Jones, “Performative Ethnography” 7). For example, an ethical and aesthetic issue arose during the devising process when I expressed my discomfort with the songs chosen to underscore many of our pieces. The rock and pop songs from the 1960s to the present didn't seem to fit the aesthetics of the EGH. Then I realized that all the songs were by white and mostly male artists. I was not privy to the demographic data on EGH clients, but being there I had seen and interacted with so many women of color that the song choices just didn't *feel* right. In our devising sessions we often came to consensus easily, and as I was one of the few people of color on the team, I didn't want to make waves. But the sense that we were not accurately representing the EGH experience kept gnawing at me. When I broached the subject, some students were defensive while others recognized my concern. The discussion opened a door. More people brought music in, and we ended up with a soundtrack that included many powerful female artists and people of color. We even discussed the importance of making our main character an African American woman, which we did. We heard constantly how the intersection of race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and class compounded the challenges of homelessness. Our understanding of that reality is what we wanted to express in our piece. In this instance, I was a woman of color in a privileged decision-making position, and I found that I had to use my privilege to pose ethical

questions of representation no matter how uncomfortable those confrontations might be. In retrospect, I wish I had gone one step further to facilitate a conversation with the women of the EGH about the show's music and soundscape.

Performance as Research

This performance-based study was about the experience of being *in* community with our neighbors. *Every Girl's a Hero* was an attempt to share the aesthetics and feeling of being participant observers at the EGH and our own awkward transition from EGH outsiders to insiders. Our performance was an offering to the EGH to thank them for letting us into their community, or what Katie Pearl calls "reciprocal exchange as a form of hospitality" (Pearl Interview 2019). Katie Pearl asserts that the role of the performance piece was to reaffirm the community "by reflecting it back to itself in such a way that it helps them see different aspects of their own community that they're not used to seeing, because they're too close to it" (Pearl Interview 2019). For these reasons, our play, while not shying away from naming the struggles of the women we met, was a celebration of their resilience and dedication to one another.

In terms of PaR the EGH project did achieve the goals of educating students about our local community and bringing us physically into that community. Michael Monicatti admitted that prior to this project he walked by the EGH without noticing it (Monicatti Interview). Like Monicatti, I was unaware of the EGH prior to this project; yet since its completion, the EGH Director and I have continued our relationship. For example, we collaborated to bring scenes from a production of Maria Irene Fornes' *Mud* to the EGH. The performance was followed by a group discussion of the production's themes, including poverty, domestic abuse, literacy, and access to health care. Nicki, the EGH client I worked with most closely, attended and

enthusiastically encouraged other clients to do so as well. Nicki greeted me as an old friend, and I was so happy to see her. We were able to re-engage with each other because of the deep rapport we had built.

The goal of providing theatre students with the experience of devising ensemble-generated work was also achieved. Motivated by this experience, I arranged a panel discussion, “Every Girl’s A Hero: Volunteering & Devising to Build Community,” for the Network of Ensemble Theater National Gathering and Symposium in June 2017. The panel brought together faculty, undergraduate, and graduate student participants with the EGH director, Ruth Herold, to discuss our collaboration. I can attest to the goodwill and affinity these individuals felt for me and for our shared experience. They were willing to sacrifice a portion of their Friday afternoon because they all recognized the importance of discussing this work in a public forum. Filled with the joy of a family reunion, the panelists’ gratitude for the EGH experience overshadowed the challenging aspects of the yearlong commitment. As the panel’s moderator, I played a video recording of *Every Girl’s A Hero* and facilitated conversations about the logistics of the partnership. A graduate student panelist shared that since the project she had become the victim of relationship violence and gained strength during those trying times by recalling similar struggles the EGH clients shared with her. Herold reiterated the importance of community connections generated by the on-site performance of *Every Girl’s A Hero* (“NET 2017 Past Forward Event Program Book Web.Pdf” 14).

Community-Based Performance

Evaluating the success of this project from the lens of community-based performance, however, becomes thornier. Inspired by the stories of the EGH clients and staff as well as our

own observations, my fellow students and I used our artistry to express collective meaning about the most pressing issue in the U District—homelessness. While devising the piece, we considered the EGH staff and clients our primary audience. We wanted to show them what we saw when we spent time there, how being part of their community made us feel, and see if we “got it right.” Our secondary audience were those unfamiliar with the EGH. We had become champions of the organization and wanted others to know about the work they did and the amazing women they serve. But we were not going to handhold the audience. They would have to come along on the ride and learn the EGH lingo and insider information.

Due to logistical constraints and aesthetic goals, however, the project was not completely “by the people” because it lacked community performers and their input in the devising process. Furthermore, Cohen-Cruz states that unlike other forms of performance, in community-based performance the process (ritual) must be as effective and gratifying for the participants as the product (art). She writes, “In mainstream theater it doesn’t matter how horrible the rehearsals are if critics deem the show a success; such a measuring stick does not fly in this field, which is equally for participants as spectators” (Cohen-Cruz 109). Therefore, this mode of art making emphasizes the equity of the process over the product. Even if the product was artistically compelling, a CBP project fails if the participants have not experienced a reciprocal relationship. I would add that the reciprocal relationship is critical because without it a meaningful relationship cannot arise between participations. I assert that relationship and community building that challenges and transcends societal structures is the overarching objective of CBP.

Similarly, feminist scholar Moya Bailey states the feminist of color art making mode she utilizes foregrounds community collaboration, or process over product. She writes,

For me, the process is the product, meaning that the process itself is productive, creative, and transformative of the conditions we are seeking to understand through the research. We are building collaboratively in ways that build community and shift existing dynamics. We are actively shaping the project of collaborating through our collective participation so that an end product, while potentially very useful, is not the only thing created by this collaborative investigation. (Bailey)

CBP's emphasis on process and the collective participation that can "shift existing dynamics" is why I see CBP as a methodology that can be considered a feminist of color and Latina feminist art making process. Therefore, to assess the success of this venture as a form of CBP and a potential feminist of color methodology, I must consider the process as well as the final artistic outcome.

In a classic CBP project, the women of the EGH themselves would have participated in the devising and would have performed on stage with us, creating and executing art in a reciprocal way that benefits both professional artists and community performers regardless of the quality of the final product. Cohen-Cruz notes that community members have a "primary relationship to the content, not necessarily the craft" (Cohen-Cruz 3). Typically, this means that during the devising process, the community partners provide the content by sharing their lived experiences and knowledge. Artists, or in our case, theatre students, contribute their craft to shape and frame the show's content. We highlighted our community exchange by creating composite characters that told how various individuals came to the EGH, including our story as newcomers. In fact, when the women started calling a longhaired male actor "the boy with the hair," we used that name in our script to underscore the community collaboration that shaped the

final performance product. Nonetheless, the women did not always have a say in our interactions with them. They could say “no” to being interviewed, but we were in the space whether they liked it or not. We should have gone out of our way to create alternate ways for the women to participate and make their desires known. For instance, we could have changed our production timeline to get critiques on our “work in progress” from the EGH community before the final performance.

In part, this omission reflects a tension between process and product. As an ensemble we were stuck in the mindset of a conventional theatre process: our community partners were the audience, and you don’t let the audience see the show until it is ready. But if we had thought of them as our collaborators, we would have brought them in earlier to critique our work. I only arrived at this realization after receiving feedback from the EGH women following our performance. During the post show discussion at the EGH, clients and staff felt comfortable enough with us to critique our performance. One client pointed out a critical aspect of the day shelter that she felt we had missed:

So, the one thing I noticed that wasn’t in there was, which I don’t know if you guys know this or not, but there are a lot of women who come here, even myself when I was a client before volunteering, who have dogs. Homeless people . . . sometimes the dog is the only one they trust ’cause they feel so vulnerable out there. (*Every Girl’s A Hero* Post Show Discussion)

Not only did she want to make sure that the EGH clients were seen and heard, but also that those aspects that make the EGH special and unique among day shelters were honored. Had we altered our process to receive this critique earlier, we could have implemented suggestions from the community on how best to represent the key role of pets.

During our post-show discussion, some clients also noted that the EGH is only one of two shelters in the city that lets clients sleep at their facility. They told us that to stay safe on the streets they stayed awake all night. Others mentioned using food stamps to buy energy drinks for this purpose. Therefore, being able to sleep during the day was key to the women's survival. These important details about navigating homelessness in our city helped us understand the role the EGH played in the community. Again, had we created a space for this feedback while devising, we could have better represented what the EGH means to its clients.

The EGH also serves a large population of transgender women, and one client asked why we did not have a transgender character in our play. We struggled to respond to this critique. We grappled with the ethics of portraying a transgender woman on stage when we did not have a transgender actor in our group. We were not sure that having a cisgender woman play such a part would be appropriate. But we could have asked the transgender clients their opinions. This is one of the difficulties of this work. While we reached a level of comfort with many clients and staff, there were certain lines we didn't cross, perhaps because we did not want to jeopardize these newly minted relationships. In retrospect, we should have brought our devising "rough drafts" to the EGH community to hear their concerns early on and in doing so find out who in the community would be interested in contributing and how.

Lessons from the EGH Project

I consider PearlDamour's *Milton* a hybrid model of both performance ethnography and CBP for the EGH project and the larger *Skies Over Seattle* collaboration. Using an ethnographic approach, they spent time in community in order to produce a performance piece as an offering to each town. Katie Pearl recalls PearlDamour's desire to "participate in something that was led

by the town, and just our presence, our energy, our interest could be the catalyst for making something happen that could last beyond the confines of our project” (Pearl Interview 2019). Through the EGH project, my cohort did something similar. At the request of the EGH Executive Director, a member of our group, Sean Ryan, created a video to promote the EGH services, and that video lives on their website to this day (“Mission/History,” *Elizabeth Gregory Home*).

Had we only conducted performance ethnography and not created a community-based performance piece for the EGH in their own setting, we all (students and the EGH clients and staff) would have missed out on a precious moment of mutual respect, understanding, and heartfelt exchange. But, if we had only led with our art making and focused our interactions on collaboratively devising a CBP with the EGH, we would have missed out on the rapport building that developed as we worked side by side in the kitchen. Yet, working side by side, we began to forget the vulnerable situation these women were in and did not do our due diligence by asking them to sign a consent form when we interviewed them or getting them more involved in the creative process in a way that worked for them. Because we were unclear about the level of artistic collaboration we wanted to pursue, we overlooked the opportunity to gain insightful critique from the women of the EGH. Their feedback not only would have improved *Every Girl's a Hero*, but also may have intensified their reception of the show, as they would have experienced a sense of authorship.

Despite the tension and pitfalls of the EGH project, I would do it again and employ what I have learned to create more equitable and ethical partnerships. Learning about the U District, the women of the EGH, and the most pressing issue in my community—homelessness, was a valuable yet secondary outcome. Community engagement is more than just working with

community partners. Artists and educators must choose carefully the methods they employ and if necessary, re-envision the artistic process to ensure that all stakeholders experience authorship and agency in addition to a quality performance product.

EGH Project as Critical/Utopian Pedagogy

Now I will explore how the EGH project functioned as a vehicle for critical or what some call utopian pedagogy for arts education in a university setting. I also examine how PearlDamour offers an example of arts education in the community, or what Paulo Freire refers to as educational projects (Freire 54). Critical and utopian pedagogies share a foundation in Freire's assertion that education must happen inside and outside of the classroom. He states that all people possess knowledge based on their lived experiences and that the educational process should be a "dialogue between these different sets of knowledge" in order to "stimulate dialogue, debate and analysis through the use of participatory educational methodology" (Kane 277). For my purposes, I will use the term pedagogy to refer to projects based in a formal educational setting such as the University of Washington's *Skies Over Seattle* project or the EGH project. I use the term educational projects to refer to community-based arts projects, such as PearlDamour's *Milton*, that do not have a partnership with an educational institution.

These community-based arts projects, particularly in a university setting, are often expensive, time-consuming, complicated, and ephemeral endeavors that don't guarantee high-quality artistic productions. Applied theater scholars such as Helen Nicholson note the ethical pitfalls of creating a "straightforward construction of local identity" that may reinforce unity over diversity and associated images of "otherness" (Duffly 284). Despite the logistical and moral minefields, scholars have also documented the rewards of such work. Catherine Ming

T'ien Duffly states that this type of embodied research fulfills Dwight Conquergood's call for a "ground-level approach" to ethnography that avoids claims of "subjective, universal knowledge" (285). Joni Jones praises the efficacy of performance ethnography as an educational tool. As she states simply, "people learn through participation" (Jones, "Performance Ethnography" 7). Norma Bowles and Daniel-Raymond Nadon, Founders of Fringe Benefits' Theater for Social Justice Institute, can point to new anti-discrimination policies and legislation as material outcomes of their community-based activist theater (Nadon and Bowles 10–11). But what these and other scholars/practitioners have not fully addressed are the results of community-based performance as a form of critical pedagogy and utopian pedagogy.

Artwork devised by students specifically for, with, and about a particular community can be a powerful form of critical pedagogy, or education in which students are able to "transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge" (Freire 19). Through this process, students build "critical consciousness" or the ability to question societal structures (35–36). In a university setting, such benefits and skills enhance the lives of theater and non-theater students alike, who experience their agency and obligation as community members in modern society. Artists such as Pearl Damour and their community partners benefit from the opportunity to learn from each other about the art-making process and the desires of the community. Therefore, through community-based art projects, theater and performance programs help universities holistically fulfill their stated missions of education, service, and civic engagement.

Critical Pedagogy

In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (originally published in 1968 and translated into English in 1970), Paulo Freire describes this pedagogy, which many refer to as critical pedagogy, as “dialogical and problem-posing education” that cultivates critical consciousness (40). He writes that this is a “pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation” (53). Critical consciousness, or in Freire’s words conscientização, is “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire 35). I suggest that community-based arts projects such as the EGH project can fulfill some of the tenets of critical pedagogy by helping students critically engage with the oppressive elements of their world and take action.

Born 1921 in Recife, Brazil, Freire describes a “culture of silence” among the dispossessed and the appearance of “ignorance and lethargy” as products of extreme poverty and social and political domination (30). He saw the poor people of his country “submerged” in their situation. “[C]ritical awareness and response,” therefore, were impossible because individuals were overwhelmed with their situation and the need to focus on survival. He saw the educational system as a “major instrument for the maintenance of this culture of silence” by reinforcing the status quo (30). Influenced by revolutionaries and theorists such as “Sartre and Mounier, Eric Fromm and Louis Althusser, Ortega y Gasset and Mou, Martin Luther King Jr. and Che Guevara, Unamuno and Arcuse,” Freire first expressed his philosophy of using education to ignite critical discourse and response in his 1959 doctoral dissertation (30–31). He further developed his ideas as Professor of History and Philosophy of Education. In 1964 Freire was jailed for his political beliefs following a military coup and upon his release seven days later was encouraged to leave Brazil. He then went to Chile and worked for The United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Chilean Institute for Agrarian Reform. In the US he was a consultant at Harvard University's School of Education and then Special Consultant to the Office of Education of the World Council of Churches in Geneva (31).

Through his theoretical writings and his practice in educational settings around the world, Freire's scholarship represents a unity of "theory and praxis," in much the same way I am exploring both the material and theoretical outcomes and applications of the EGH project. Freire advocated for learning through "educational projects" instead of "systemic education" (i.e., the prevailing education system) (54). While the EGH project was educational, it was created and facilitated by a university in the prevailing educational system. In fact, the work PearlDamour has done with the *Milton* project better fits Freire's definition of an educational project as that collaboration was between artists and the community without an educational institution as the intermediary. But the EGH project's position as an educational project within the realm of systemic education highlights the fact that not all aspects of the endeavor fit the strict definition of critical pedagogy. As a participant in this project, I know that the experience activated my critical consciousness and armed me with new skills and information. Therefore, I want to move away from an "all or nothing" conception of critical and utopian pedagogy to ascertain how one can harness and deploy the benefits of this pedagogy even in educational situations that are less than ideal. Moving away from "all or nothing" thinking was, for me, one of the gifts of the EGH project. Even if we cannot *solve* societal injustices, there is value in building community connections. Freire notes that entering into "communion" with others is the first step toward "authentic comradeship" and solidarity (48).

The EGH project fits the mold of critical pedagogy in two important ways: 1) the long-term investment in building a relationship with our community partner, and 2) the relationship

between the instructors (PearlDamour) and their students. While one could argue that few relationships persisted past the project, we did make an investment in building relationships with EGH clients and staff during the project. We worked regular shifts at the EGH for nine of the twelve months we spent on the project. Also, the fact that the leadership of PearlDamour were not on site, either at the EGH or UW, through the majority of the project allowed for co-intentional education. As Freire defines co-intentional education, “[t]eachers and students co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of co-creating knowledge” (69). PearlDamour didn’t impart the knowledge we gained being at the EGH. Instead, they offered their knowledge of the devising process, which we had to enact on our own and find our own way within that method. Then, we as students added what we learned from the EGH community and together the three groups (students, EGH, PearlDamour) co-created knowledge through “common reflection and action” (69).

The EGH project did not fit Freire’s notion of critical pedagogy in several key ways. For Freire, one must identify the oppressed and the oppressors, but the EGH project also does not meet this requirement. While it is clear that homeless citizens are oppressed, it is more difficult to identify a single culprit. Additionally, in a conventional critical pedagogy project, the educational outcomes for women experiencing homelessness would be the main objective. I am not exploring educational outcomes for the clients of the EGH, as that would be infringing on the role of EGH staff. I am interested in how educational projects inspire and empower students, especially when they feel overwhelmed by the injustice they see all around them. Can utopian performatives lift us all out of our “culture of silence” and offer hope for and examples of a more just world? Freire noted this concern by writing, “One of the gravest obstacles to the

achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness" (51). His prescription for addressing this obstacle is "praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (51). While students may not be able to address every aspect of the oppression they witness, can they do *something* to make a difference? Can they take a small first step by building community connections?

For Freire, critical pedagogy is not just an educational practice but also a political discourse on power, liberation, and conceiving new paradigms. "This then," he writes, "is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" from this unjust system (44). Freire notes that the oppressed cannot liberate themselves by becoming the oppressor. True liberation is tied to the liberation of the oppressor from a systemic position that puts the needs of the two at odds. In this system the dehumanization of the oppressed is required for the humanization of the oppressor. Freire recognizes that the oppressive system dehumanizes both. For the students of the EGH project, like myself, the daily act of ignoring the homeless population in our neighborhood or offering assistance to some and not others felt dehumanizing. How can an empathetic person see injustice and do nothing? How can one respond when they know they cannot fix the entire system? To survive and keep from being crushed by despair, must those witnessing oppression become less human? Avert their gaze? Forget what they see?

Freire's answer to these questions is to see the world as not fixed and given, a place to be adjusted to, but rather a problem to be solved and a system to be transformed. "To surmount the situation of oppression," he states, "people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation" (47). Through this process of critical reflection one is no longer oppressor or oppressed but "human in the process of achieving

freedom” (48). Therefore, a foundational tenet of this theory is that anyone, no matter how enmeshed in the “culture of silence,” can look critically at the world through dialectic thought where “world and action are intimately interdependent” (53). Reflection is also critical to this process, which Freire defines as “dialoging with people about their actions” (53). Through this dialogue, participants move away from the paternalistic model of student-teacher relationship, and learn from each other. Freire calls for a solidarity that requires individuals to enter into the same situation as those with whom they are in solidarity (49). While we as students did not live on the streets of Seattle to show our solidarity with unsheltered women, we could join their situation in the EGH on a regular basis during our work-exchange hours. In Freire’s words, solidarity with the oppressed can only be achieved when one “stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category,” and starts to build solidarity through action or “praxis” (50). By working side-by-side with clients and staff in the EGH, and learning their names and stories for almost a year, we could begin to build a solidarity in a way that moved beyond the abstract notion of homelessness, but was based in personal connections. Highlighting their stories, as the foundation for our devised performance piece was our attempt to pay tribute to their struggle and the artistic potential we all share regardless of our economic or political situation.

Similarly, Freire worked with illiterate individuals who became empowered not only by their newfound functional abilities to read and write, but also by their capacity to create. Therefore, the creative process is a crucial aspect of critical pedagogy. By devising a performance piece using the words and daily activities of community partners, all participants experience themselves as creators of culture.

Community-based theater projects can activate a “critical empathy,” so we can empathize without being crushed by despair. We experience hope through utopian performatives. In this

analysis we are all submerged in our situation and it takes an act of critical empathy to lift ourselves above our situation. We then can see ourselves within the system.

The book *Utopian Pedagogy*, by Mark Coté, Richard J.F. Day, and Greig de Peuter, is a collection of essays about various experiments in the field of critical education, a form of pedagogy that opposes neoliberalism and the conflation of democracy and capitalism. The projects described are utopian in the way they encourage students to conceive of and enact alternate social systems and relationship. The wide variety of contributors share a foundation in critical pedagogy. Freire himself saw critical pedagogy as a hopeful tool to “demystify the evil in this pervasive fatalism that characterizes the neoliberal discourse at the end of this century” (26). I assert that community-based performance such as the EGH project are fertile ground for utopian performatives, which are moments in performance that “make palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better, were the goals of social justice achieved” (Dolan, “Utopia in Performance” 165). These projects are tools for critical education because, through utopian performatives, they offer hope for change and a vision of alternate social structures. For these reasons I will use the term utopian pedagogy to refer to critical pedagogy employed specifically in resistance to late capitalism. For Freire, “pedagogy” was not a teaching method but a “philosophy or social theory” (Freire 26).

Documentary performance, particularly community-based devised theater, is an ideal vehicle for utopian pedagogy because such projects ignite critical consciousness, facilitate university and community interaction, and encourage universities and their students to recognize and embody their roles and responsibilities as community members. This work is particularly important in an urban setting where the traumas of homelessness and addiction are often conspicuous elements of the urban landscape. Through these projects, participants learn tactics

and information to address such trauma with critical empathy and can build lasting tactical coalitions.

As Jen Harvie notes in *Theatre & The City*, the city is also a contested space. It is a contradictory place, with both “small beauties, zones of possibilities,” and a place where “desires wash up, are fed, disrupted, chained, dodged or neutered by what people call late capitalism” (Harvie xvi). We see these contradictions in the gross disparities and uneven distribution of power, wealth, and opportunity the city enables, as well as the personal connections and support networks forged through these inequities. Both demonstrate our civic identity and values (2). These inequalities force inhabitants to blur public and private spaces. Students spend hours in public cafes, making them their personal study or salon. Residents experiencing homelessness sit on the sidewalk with friends to create makeshift living rooms. Both exemplify Harvie’s definition of the city as “ever-changing geographical, architectural, political and social structures where most people live and work densely gathered in extremely complex social structures” (6). Theater and performance are cultural practices that allow us to examine how we live together in cities. In the case of the *Skies Overs Seattle* and the EGH project, we used theater to “intervene in and change the conventional urban process” that creates and enforces social hierarchies which separate citizens even as they live together (9). In fact, living together and placing these inequities side by side (the world-class research university next to homeless encampments) is what cities do.

Whether within or outside of urban spaces, Jan Cohen-Cruz asserts that community-based art must be oriented toward community development, in the same vein as a community clinic or school. Projects should be integrated and accessible to the community and perform the crucial function of facilitating community dialogue and creating a space to envision possibilities. In the

words of anthropologist Victor Turner, performance can be the “exploring antennae by which we move forward” (Cohen-Cruz 6). The practitioners Cohen-Cruz has interviewed demonstrate their commitment to the higher ideals of community-based art making by characterizing it as “not a career but a way of life” (6). Cohen-Cruz does, though, shy away from considering this work a form of pedagogy and categorizes performance practices grounded in education as “cousins, not siblings” of community-based art.

If community-based art is the vehicle for utopian pedagogy through educational projects within and outside of a university setting, then they must share similar values. Monica Prendergast offers a definition of arts education as grounded in the “collective creation of socially imagined performative utopias” (Prendergast, "Utopian Performatives and the Social Imaginary" 5). This is what PearlDamour does. They lay the groundwork for moments of socially imagined performative utopias that are created in concert with community partners. The artists that make up PearlDamour are also educators. In my interviews with Katie Pearl and Ashley Sparks they define themselves as “educators, theater makers, engagement strategists, curators, producers,” but both have worked in formal education settings (universities, community colleges, high schools) (Sparks). Therefore, learning in the classroom or in community is the foundational aspect of their work. Their work aligns with Prendergast’s assertion that dramatic education is a process that “embodies and defines socially committed moral values of active and engaged democracy and the protection and implementation of universal human rights” (59). By working with communities to create events, performances, and community dialogues, they also subscribe to political philosopher Charles Taylor’s argument that modern humanity has socially imagined our present and can “shift those collective acts of imagination” to envision new ways of living in the world (59). Their work, like the work of many community-based theater artists, is

founded in the notion that arts-based research can successfully build and express knowledge in a poetic and aesthetic manner that is just as powerful as doing so in a quantitative and scientific manner. Similar to Prendergast, Pearl Damour's work asserts that it is only appropriate that arts-based research render its findings in artistic forms. There is what Prendergast has termed a "socially committed pedagogy" (60). Community-based performance is a particularly fertile environment for utopian performatives because its methodology is based on utopian principles. The process of devising community-based theater pieces is built upon the practice of utopian gestures, or activities that cannot be easily commoditized, such as listening, sharing, serving, and creating. Utopian performatives not only confer a powerful feeling but also establish nodes of connection that can be activated to make material improvements to the world off stage.

Devising as a Utopian Methodology

In fact, many moments of *Every Girl's a Hero* were re-enactments of the sensorial experience of the world within the EGH and our attempt to capture moments of hope we had experienced. In one movement/dance piece, we used stylized gestures of eating at the kitchen table, the hub of the community, set to Henry Mancini's instrumental "Baby Elephant Walk" to represent our own awkwardness when asked to join the women for a meal during our work exchange shifts. By turning the quotidian gestures and rituals into dance, "the gestures accumulate[d] meaning (and value) as they were repeated" (Duffly 287). During the post-show discussion after the culminating performance in May 2016, the EGH clients identified the dance as a moment that resonated with them. This recognition of their meal ritual defined our shared identity as EGH "members" through mutual embodied experience and concrete knowledge rather than just location.

Spending time in community and then collectively devising artistic work with and for each other is a utopian act. Doing so assumes that art can come from the quotidian, or that which is often ignored or taken for granted, and that everyone can make and receive art. José Esteban Muñoz identifies a similar utopian sensibility in the philosophical mode of “astonished contemplation” which he locates in the pop-culture artwork of Andy Warhol. Muñoz asserts that Warhol’s art expresses his astonishment with the radical democratic potentiality of quotidian mass-produced items such as a can of Campbell’s soup or a bottle of Coca-Cola (Muñoz 7). “America,” Warhol states, “started the tradition where the richest consumer buys essentially the same thing as the poorest. . . . The President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke too” (7). For Warhol these disposable items are wondrous embodiments of an egalitarian utopianism. Muñoz associates astonishment with a reprieve from what Marxist utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch called “the darkness of the lived instant;” or in Muñoz’ words, “[a]stonishment helps one surpass the limitations of an alienating presentness and allow one to see a different time and place” (5). This state is not unlike Freire’s description of the dispossessed being “submerged in a culture of silence.” Art often provides astonished contemplation, or a momentary escape from the oppressive present and a glimpse of a better world. Astonished contemplation is similar to critical empathy in that both lift us out of entrenched position within the present moment and the hegemonic systems that rule our world. For a moment we feel or notice something new, yet we are not overwhelmed by our emotional experience, discovery, or astonishment. We retain the critical distance necessary to contemplate and or act. For Warhol, even concrete everyday items, not just art, can ignite a moment of astonished contemplation.

In fact, when devising, or collaboratively creating community-based theater pieces, the quotidian item or conversation is often the source of artistic inspiration. Enacting and representing a repertoire of activities and objects—daily rituals, routines, interviews, clothing, work and household items—becomes the raw material for such performances. And, not unlike Warhol's work, it is the commonplace or even trivial nature of these articles and instances that give them their impact on stage. The quotidian is rediscovered, reframed, and celebrated through art but also acknowledged as art itself. Therefore, community partners always already possess artistic content, and it is through a collaborative artistic process that the content is revealed and displayed.

An example of everyday artistry highlighted in *Every Girl's a Hero* was a moment inspired by expired tubs of salsa-flavored cream cheese. I was volunteering in the kitchen at the EGH when these tubs arrived as part of the weekly food donation provided by local grocery stores. Sandra, the manager on duty and a former EGH client, noticed that the cream cheese was about to expire, so I began to throw them away. Sandra stopped me and told me to instead throw out the cream cheese but keep the tubs and wash them. The EGH is only open during the week, so clients are often given food to take with them for the weekend. To Sandra, those tubs were much needed to-go containers. This moment was reenacted in our performance piece to symbolize the many times we witnessed staff and EGH clients repurpose and reinvent their limited resources. Like the 1980s TV secret agent and action hero *MacGyver*, Sandra and her staff regularly armed their clients with rain boots made of plastic bags to survive Seattle's inhospitable weather, and provided adult diapers to perfectly healthy women who faced the daunting task of accessing public bathrooms in the city (*MacGyver*).

As a pedagogical exercise, the project reminded us how close we all are to homelessness, food insecurity, and marginalization. We gained specific knowledge about the so-called “social safety net.” For example, we learned that some members of these communities could only attend our matinee performance, as they needed to be in shelters in the evening or lose their spots. Some who did attend the 7:30 pm show chose to forego their spot at the shelter and wander the streets all night. We also learned that the donations most needed by our partners were items not covered by food stamps, including underwear, socks, tampons, toilet paper, toothpaste, and other toiletries. In fact, my favorite line in *Every Girl's a Hero* was “I can't believe tampons and pads aren't covered by food stamps” (Pearl).

The collaborative devising process itself celebrates the everyday artistry and the potential artist in everyone. For example, in one movement piece actors highlighted the artful innovation and virtuosity of EGH staff by continually traversing a cramped hallway with arms full of items to replicate the rush of the morning deliveries or preparations for the annual Valentine's or Christmas Party. At various moments fast-paced movements were contrasted with slow and careful movements through the hallway while clients slept on the floor—also a regular occurrence at the EGH. The “home” in Elizabeth Gregory Home is more of an emotional descriptor than an architectural one. With recent renovations the physical space of the EGH, which occupies the lower floors of the University Lutheran church, has grown to include showers and additional sleeping and office spaces. But at the time of this project, the “home” consisted of a kitchen, a storage room, a small office and a hallway that functioned as the primary living space. Therefore, performing these movement rituals as dance reflected our growing admiration and understanding of the work of the staff, many of whom, like Sandra, were once homeless. Our normative understanding of the staff as “workers” shifted as we witnessed

the artistry with which they utilized every ounce of usable space to create a home for as many women as possible.

We reenacted these quotidian moments and utilized items commonly found at the EGH (plastic bags, boxes, cooking utensils) to share our astonished contemplation as we saw these things transformed through inventiveness and imagination. Our astonished contemplation momentarily lifted us out of our current and sometimes bleak encounters at the day-shelter. In these instances, we witnessed disenfranchised women asserting agency and command of their situation. They were no longer transient individuals but members of a community. While utopian performatives are embodied experiences of a more just and equitable common future, I experienced astonished contemplation as a paradigm shift in the present. Just as Warhol saw the radical democratic potentiality of a bottle of Coca-Cola, the empty tub of cream cheese that became the to-go container, and the discarded grocery bags that became the rain boots revealed new dimensions and unseen potentiality in the women we met (Dolan, “Performance, Utopia, and the ‘Utopian Performative’” 455). By highlighting these moments of astonished contemplation, we attempted to create for our audience a similar sensation of discovery that would lift them out of their present moment and normative understanding. We wanted the audience to understand the valuable knowledge and rich life experiences that made these women brave, savvy, and seasoned navigators of our shared urban landscape, not unlike superheroes.

During our yearlong collaboration we produced a promotional video for the EGH with testimony from clients and staff who were once clients. In fact, much of the audio and video in our performance piece came from that aspect of *Every Girl's A Hero*. Therefore, one can consider the video and the live performance as a type of cross platform or mixed media strategy. The permanence of the video counterbalances the ephemerality of the live performance. Initially

the video was not part of the EGH project, but, as noted above, was a request from the EGH Executive Director Ruth Herold. Sean Ryan, a graduate student in the MFA directing program, created the video and built a meaningful relationship with the clients and staff during that process. In fact, Herold and the EGH Executive Board offered Ryan a job as EGH's Development Director. When asked about this opportunity Ryan replied, "I worked in nonprofit for ten years so I know about development. It is something I would consider after graduation . . . I would be willing to sit on the Board and help to conceive of benefits. That is something I could see myself doing. I would never have considered it before" (Ryan Interview). Although Ryan graciously refused the job so he could complete his graduate work, he has maintained his relationship with the EGH and Herold in particular. In fact, she and her husband have attended several of Ryan's shows. Herold and Ryan found that they share a love of theater, as well as a commitment to issues of homelessness. During the post-show conversation with the audience, Ryan shared his own experience with homelessness and the cathartic nature of this educational experience.

When I was younger, I was the child of a homeless mother, and so it was nice to kind of revisit and come back to that . . . And it was just really so worthwhile to hear all the different experiences, and I really gained what EGH meant to all of the people, from staff to volunteers to people that were on the board. It was really unique and really, real. It was really good.

(Ryan Interview)

More than friends, Ryan and Herold have become community allies who share values, and experiences, as well as geographic space. They are now nodes in a network that can be activated as needed, or which I am calling a tactical coalition.

Herold was cautiously optimistic about the possibility of strategic coalitions formed from the EGH project, and stated: “The fact that you and myself and Sean are still in conversation is a good indicator of the impact” (Herold Interview 2016). She went on to state that continued collaboration was more likely with the School of Drama than with the School of Nursing or the School of Social Work, as those programs require the EGH to provide professional supervision. Therefore, Herold found arts collaborations “a better return on investment” and more impactful for EGH clients. These sentiments were echoed by Shilo Murphy, director of PHRA (The Needle Exchange), who also characterized this collaboration with the School of Drama as more important than previous partnerships with the schools of Social Work and Public Health. He claimed that stories are more powerful and politically efficacious than data (Murphy).

From post-show discussions and interviews, I found that community partners felt “seen and heard” (if only for the duration of the show) by the performances. During the post show discussion an EGH client commented,

I thought it was great. What I liked is that you guys had scenes and real people that actually go to EGH every day. This place saved me. I used to stand outside and walk around and. . . . But here it is like a home. They do treat you like a person. They don’t treat you like a homeless person. And I thank all you guys. I just thank you guys so much. (*Every Girl’s A Hero* Post-Show Discussion)

Another woman came up to me after the EGH performance and said that she wanted the Police Chief to see this play because she felt that Seattle police were not sympathetic to unsheltered citizens. This comment is just one example of the kind of information about our local community

that I gained, as well as a newfound empathy and understanding for the challenges inherent in the urban landscape.

The University of Washington, like any other public university in the US, exists within a stable yet often challenging financial situation. And within the university, humanities programs, particular the arts, are the lowest on the financial food chain. But, compared to the EGH, the University of Washington, Seattle campus, is populated by shiny new buildings, stately and authoritative old ones, and cranes and willing donors poised to build more. These buildings are peopled by students, faculty, and staff with the means and cultural capital to authoritatively occupy these buildings. A few blocks away, homeless members of the community camp in tents or build homes with shopping carts and found materials. In the case of the EGH, a handful of female staff make a basement a temporary home and resource center for women from 9am-5pm, Monday through Friday. Just by accessing the material inequity of these two institutions we might ask how anything that comes from them can do more than reinforce inequality, and the educational and financial systems that create and sustain these injustices.

The students involved in this project had the leisure to pursue an artistic path because they are not struggling to survive. Given the transient nature of their lives, the EGH clients could not be fully integrated into the performance piece. Their words were coopted and performed by others. A cultural studies classmate challenged my assertion that volunteering at the EGH was my attempt to “dwell” in community. She saw my artistic labor as transactional. I paid for the women’s stories and my work in the kitchen was the currency I use. My work at the EGH was a capitalist transaction par excellence. Therefore, what we created were not lasting relationships that could produce real change. In fact, my personal connections have been most strongly maintained with the staff and not the EGH clients. While her point was valid and sobering, and

while the EGH project had many faults and shortcomings, as noted earlier, my lived experience over that year compels me to believe that spending time with the EGH leadership and clients and hearing their stories cannot be dismissed as simply transactional.

Community members shared their stories proudly and saw the artistry of their work and lives in the urban space reflected back to them through performance. Both groups made meaningful connections and formed new community associations that transcended normative geographic boundaries and hierarchical structures.

The impact of community-based performance is often felt by the audience and participants in the form of utopian performatives. Although the feeling of utopia is ephemeral, it leaves deep connections that can be activated after the moment of theater has passed. Utopian performatives are not always overtly political, nor do they necessarily display utopia by constructing it on stage. Jill Dolan's focus has been on audience members who feel these fleeting moments of utopia, or moments that "shake their consciousness of themselves and the world" (Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative'" 456). In this study, I have considered how the moment of utopia impacts performers and their community partners. While I have experienced moments of utopia in performance throughout my acting career, this community-based project marks the first time I have built on these connections after the production has ended. Doing so is the lasting benefit of CBP.

CBP is also utopian because it asserts that performance can do things in the world which is similar to J.L. Austin's notion of speech acts, or instances when "to *say* something is to *do* something"(Austin 147). The CBP practitioner believes/knows that the artistic process, as a repetition of utopic gestures, does something by impacting participants in unseen ways. Dolan asserts that performance can do these things as well. She writes:

I want to train my students to use performance as a tool for making the world better, to . . . incite people to profound responses that shake their consciousness of themselves in the world. Perhaps that already is utopian, the idea that theatre can do any of those things. (Dolan, “Performance, Utopia, and the ‘Utopian Performative’” 456)

While Dolan is not referring specifically to community-based theater but theater in general, community-based theater practitioners such as Katie Pearl and Ashley Sparks attest to the fact that their work regularly leads to transformative moments in performance and lasting connections off stage. In this instance the utopian feeling that Dolan describes is turned into real world actions. Through the EGH project, my fellow students and I were able to experience the benefits and limitations of documentary performance in the mode of community-based performance and performance ethnography informed by women of color and Latina feminist thought. Furthermore, we got a glimpse of the utopian potential of critical pedagogy in facilitating moments of hope, action, and community connection. The ability of art to lift both students and community partners out of hopelessness, even for a moment, is the true value of this form of documentary performance.

Chapter Two: Documentary Performance as Performative Historiography

Jonestown. The very word evokes a series of volatile images: Kool Aid, the jungle, hundreds of dead bodies - the eyes of Jim Jones hidden behind his omnipresent sunglasses . . .

Production Program

The People's Temple,

Berkeley Repertory Theatre, 2005

And before you abuse, criticize, and accuse

Walk a mile in my shoes

Walk A Mile in My Shoes,

Music and Lyrics by Joe South, 1970

Closing song, *The People's Temple*

Introduction

The first of the two epigraphs above appeared in the program of the 2005 world premiere of *The People's Temple*, a play about the 1978 mass murder/suicide in "Jonestown," Guyana, written by Leigh Fondakowski, Greg Pierotti, Stephen Wangh, and Margo Hall. Berkeley Repertory Theatre's Artistic Director Tony Taccone invoked these images to capture the collective memory of Peoples Temple and the Jonestown tragedy. He goes on to state in the program that the production was an attempt to question these images by bringing new voices and

information to the stage and troubling any singular or decisive understanding of the Temple and its demise (*The People's Temple at Berkeley Rep*). The lyrics of the closing number are a compelling distillation of the production's goals: "And before you abuse, criticize, and accuse," the song invites the audience to, "Walk a mile in my shoes." Through the closing song and various artistic choices, the production successfully destabilized the accepted narrative of Jonestown—as a cult blindly following the tyrant who wiped them out completely in a tragic massacre—through performative historiography. Performance scholar Scott Magelssen defines performative historiography as "enunciating a particular selection and arrangement of records and reifying a carefully curated view of the past" (Magelssen, *Swimming* 19). In addition to curating a view of the past, as is the case with any work of documentary theatre, this piece expands and even questions conventional explanations by pairing the expected with new or less circulated information, images, and sounds. Film scholar Anna Siomopoulos describes performative historiography projects that display historic silent films with contemporary music and prose as a means of "destabilizing film text, reanimating film reception, and complicating film spectatorship through music, spoken word, and multiple voices" (Siomopoulos and Zimmerman 11). Doing so can foster a historical understanding of these films in a more complex way than simply watching the films alone would allow. The goals of performative historiography echoes those of queer curation as defined by Gopinath Gayatri and discussed in the introduction. Through queer curation objects and aesthetic practices are "cared for" and "cared about" by placing seemingly unconnected items in proximity to one another (e.g., The Peoples Temple gospel album and news reports of their deaths) to make apparent their connections. In this case the play reveals "the co-implication and radical relationality of seemingly disparate" information. (Gopinath 4). I assert that *The People's Temple* does

something similar with this particular form of documentary performance—documentary theatre. In this chapter I consider documentary theatre as a form of documentary performance and performative historiography that can revisit history and facilitate civic dialogue about traumatic events. *The People's Temple* is a rich case study of theatre documentary, theatre used to accomplish performative historiography by destabilizing, reanimating, and complicating what we think we know about this traumatic event. The play also makes visible a “queer diaspora,” which is a “queer and feminist formation of diaspora” that recognizes the regional nature of shared trauma (Gopinath 5–6). People throughout the country are connected to each other by involvement in Peoples Temple and the Jonestown tragedy. By performing the words and music of Temple members and their families and re-imagining well known moments in this history, the audience learns so much more than they would by simply being presented the documentary evidence. Much like the EGH project in the previous chapter, this work of documentary performance is used to center the narrative on the community, or in this case the *people* of Peoples Temple. By utilizing their words and music to tell *their* story, the story is transformed from one that focuses on a single individual, Jim Jones, but on the relationships and devotion the congregation had with each other.

As a form of performative historiography, documentary theatre utilizes, as Diana Taylor's the *archive*, through in-depth research of documents akin to journalism and historiography, and what Taylor refers to as the *repertoire*, through the performance of interviews, gestures, music, and dance (Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* 19). Similar to Taylor's critique of the archive as being informed by entrenched forms of power, Carol Martin critiques documentary theatre by labeling the archive it uses as an “operation of power,” and posing the question “who decides what is archived and how?” (Martin 10) *The People's Temple*

certainly falls into the category of documentary theatre that Martin interrogates. The project, however, responds to Martin's critique about the inequities of the archive by adding over 300 hours of new interviews to the Peoples Temple archive and expanding its repertoire to now include this play and several books inspired by, and in some cases generated through, the devising process (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 276). Fondakowski highlights the need for books that augment the information presented in the play: "In the play," Fondakowski writes, "we used about ten percent of what we collected" (Fondakowski 315). The wealth of material created for this production is now housed at The California Historical Society and includes the largest collection of interviews to date on Peoples Temple (Fondakowski xx).

Tapping into the richness of the Temple's archive and repertoire, the play accesses and amplifies the faint voices of the *people* of Peoples Temple. Through the testimony of the deceased and survivors, the audience learns lesser-known or forgotten facts about Peoples Temple. They see and hear that the congregation was multiracial, with a large African-American population, and that in the 1970s Reverend Jim Jones was a respected religious and civic leader as well as a powerful force in Bay Area progressive politics. Most importantly, they learn that there were survivors, and among the living and the dead there were many members who remained with the Temple out of their devotion to each other and not just to Jones. In my interview with the play's director, Leigh Fondakowski, she consistently emphasized this important, overlooked, and often misunderstood point about the Jonestown story. What drew her into the project was the stark contrast between what she *thought* she knew about Jonestown (e.g., brainwashed cult members) and the reality of the individuals she met.

Stephan Jones, the son of Jim Jones, was the first person Fondakowski interviewed. She was struck by his devotion to his fellow congregation members. He has spent much of his life

annotating pictures and documents with the names of temple members. In fact, we see his character performing this task throughout the play. Fondakowski describes meeting Jones for the first time:

In your mind it's this huge story, these scary cult-y people and the horrific thing that happened. [S]tephan, by contrast, he was just like a regular guy. Very contemplative, very smart, very calm, very—even in his way of speaking. He sort of laid down the gauntlet, he said . . . “We had enough of this sensationalism, and we need something deeper . . . think about Jim Jones as a man and as a father.” I was just totally blown away and then I met a few other of the surviving people. They seemed like regular, normal everyday people. I got drawn into it from the contrast between “Cult of Death” on the cover of *Newsweek* and how kind of benign and ordinary and normal the people seemed. (Fondakowski Interview)

For Stephan Jones, who was born and raised in the Temple, the congregation was his family. His tie to them was just as strong as it was to his biological father, Jim Jones. More than anyone else he exemplifies the theme of community connection that runs throughout the piece. The kinship members forged with each other tied them to the Temple just as strongly as their loyalty to Jones. The play also tells of members who were deeply devoted to Jones such as the Moore daughters. Some stayed because of Jones, and others, despite him.

From the very beginning of the development process Fondakowski and the writing team noted this contrast between what circulated in the popular consciousness and the reality of the survivors they were meeting. Through documentary theater they shared documentation, such as archival photos and recordings as well as the actual words of their interviewees, to give credence

to this contrast they were sharing with the audience. Ultimately it was this contrast that destabilized the accepted “Cult of Death” trope.

The People’s Temple expands the Peoples Temple archive and repertoire while troubling the doxa, or common beliefs and popular opinions of the Jonestown tragedy. By telling the story through a newly expanded archive of testimony and music, the local community is asked to reckon with the massacre in Guyana, the valorization of Jones prior to the massacre, and the lack of attention paid to survivors and their families in the intervening years. Fondakowski provided a rationale for Berkeley Rep’s “extensive community collaboration” on this production by stating, “It is fitting to premiere this play at Berkeley Rep because the movement has such presence in the Bay Area [W]ith the sudden murders of San Francisco mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk nine days after the Jonestown tragedy, all real dialogue about Peoples Temple ceased” (“*The People’s Temple* at Berkeley Rep”). Therefore, in the tradition of *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman) and *Fires in the Mirror* (Smith, 1992) *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* (Smith, 1993). *The People’s Temple* utilizes verbatim interviews, letters, and recordings to add a nuanced understanding of this tragedy and to facilitate community discussions that had been deferred. By expanding the Peoples Temple archive to include this play as well as new interviews conducted during the devising process, these artists help generate more complex conversations about Jonestown in the future; ones that cannot conveniently be summed up by the cultural catch phrase, “drinking the Kool-Aid.”

Additionally, just as I interrogated the underlying feminist ethos in the development and devising led by Pearl Damour in the EGH project, I explore the feminist traits of Fondakowski’s directing and devising methods. While the play itself can be an example of documentary theater used to expand the archive and trouble oversimplified understandings of history, Fondakowski’s

approach and use of Moment Work can be viewed as a feminist practice that cultivates community dialogue and at times collides with the goals and sensibilities of commercial theatre.

Peoples Temple

Names are of particular importance throughout this project. The legal name of the Jones's religious organization was Peoples Temple of the Disciples of Christ. While founded as part of the Christian denomination of the Disciples of Christ, as it grew in popularity and engaged in greater political activism the group became known colloquially as Peoples Temple, without an apostrophe (Fondakowski 319). The absence of the apostrophe makes what would otherwise be a possessive noun into an adjective. My research and the play itself do not explain this grammatical choice, but in fact for many years there was no physical temple, just people.

To differentiate it from the organization, the makers of the play named their work *The People's Temple*, adding the article and the apostrophe (Fondakowski 319). In so doing they center the story on temple members, not Jones. A discussion of the Temple's name, its chronology, and newly obtained information were listed in the production program to equip the audience with the context for embodied acts on stage ("*The People's Temple* at Berkeley Rep").

The People's Temple

Much like in Chapter One I am equally concerned with the process and impact of the production as well as the play itself. Therefore, I will spend some time describing the world premiere performance and the play text but the majority of the chapter will focus on the artistic process rather than the product.

Crafted and performed to shift the gaze from Jones to the congregation, *The People's Temple* script features fifty-nine characters, twenty-four described as African-American, thirty-four described as Caucasian, and two without ethnic designation. Characters include living and deceased Temple members, their families, as well as journalists and government officials who had direct dealings with the Temple (Fondakowski et al.). Actor and director Margo Hall, the only African American on the writing team, explained that the team wanted to include as many actual people as possible in order to distance their piece from docudrama, which often creates fictional composite characters based on real people (Hall). The team wanted the audience to understand that what they were hearing were the actual words of Temple members and their families. Doing so, the production could build credibility with the audience who might not believe new or unknown information or assume that various details were added to sensationalize the story. Characters are listed in alphabetical order. Jones is not the first character listed, therefore, but the twentieth, and has no dialogue until page fourteen. This is another tactic employed to focus the story on temple members. The ensemble of ten actors—six Caucasian and four African American, six women and four men—perform multiple characters, to highlight the ethnic and cultural diversity of the congregation (Fondakowski et al. 2–3).

The first character to appear on stage is simply named an Archivist. This character reappears throughout the show to introduce each new character to the audience and is played by every member of the ensemble. The Archivist is named in the script but not listed in the program; therefore, the audience is unaware that their guide through the play has a title. With the exception of the Archivist, every character portrayed is an actual person (Fondakowski et al.). It is fitting that the Archivist has a role to play in this story. In fact, the existence of the Archivist points again to the project as a queer visual aesthetic practice, as it is an “archival practice that

suggests alternate understanding” (Gopinath 5). The archive and its importance are not just denoted by a physical space, but also personified through an embodied presence. Audience members are reminded that for better or worse, people decide what is archived, who can access it, and which items enter the public consciousness. In my interview with cast member Velina Brown, she confirmed that the cast had the opportunity to interact with actual artifacts and that doing so inspired various scenes. She notes that finding the choir robe in a box of archival materials was a pivotal point in the devising process. Unlike sunglasses worn by Jim Jones or the tubs that held cyanide-laced punch, this item pointed to the quality of temple members’ lives and not just the circumstances of their deaths (Brown Interview).

By starting in the archive, the play enacts what Richard Schechner labels “showing doing,” re-creating, in a highly performative manner, this moment in the devising process and the meaning this article of clothing might have had to a member of the temple community (Schechner 28). Indeed, while the first item revealed to the audience from one of the archival boxes is a choir robe—a symbol of performance—there is no singing in the archive, no sound, no music, no performance (Fondakowski et al. 4). In the archive there are only words. The Archivist, therefore, must conjure the music from his memory. Stage directions for the opening scene read:

An open space lined with lots of shelves with boxes. An Archivist enters with a box. He opens the box and reveals a choir robe. He begins to hum the tune of “He’s Able.” The robe conjures a memory: Upstage from the shelves a WOMAN begins to sing “He’s Able,” crossing DS (down stage) near the archivist who holds the robe with his eyes closed. As the sound builds, the rest of the company enters, joining the singing. (4)

Through the embodied act of remembering, then, the Archivist brings music and more voices into the archive. The singing woman who represents this memory is positioned upstage, outside of the archive. As she moves down stage and closer to the archive, the strength of the sound grows, and it continues to build as additional singers join the space. The singing shows the audience the work the choir robe is doing inside the archive. Singing blends the archive (written word) and the repertoire (embodied act) and actualizes the role of music and oral history to function as “vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity” (Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* 16). Music and the communal act of singing were integral parts of the Peoples Temple—so much so that they produced an album.

Songs from Peoples Temple’s little-known gospel album *He’s Able* frame the show, which is presented as a collection of monologues and dialogues created from new interviews, and archival sources such as letters, recordings, and oral histories by and about Temple members (Peoples Temple Choir). Having the cast sing gospel and pop songs from *He’s Able* juxtaposes the horror of the congregation’s deaths with the joy and fellowship of their lives, a moment of queer curation. The audience hears voices in harmony with each other, not with Jim Jones.

In my interview with her, Fondakowski described her initial reaction to hearing *He’s Able*, the Peoples Temple gospel album.

[F]inding the album, listening to the music for the first time . . . it, it’s good! You know it’s really good . . . like these guys are rocking it out and the woman is singing, you know that first song, that total seventies vibe. . . it was like “Wow this is so amazing!” And these people and their aspirations and their hard work is there. And I had a lot of fun with it because I’ve never worked with source material that was that alive. (Fondakowski Interview)

In addition to being impressed with the quality of the music, Fondakowski identifies the album as a document of the congregation's communal life and artistic work. The theater was the ideal space to display the "liveness" of this artifact and to share the exuberance and joy expressed in the music. By singing songs from the album, rather than just playing the recordings, the actors could breathe life into the archive by physically enacting the Temple's repertoire. As a result, the audience experiences a small sampling of the artistry and community building that took place at the Temple's dynamic services.

The music also offered a structure for illustrating the lure of the Temple and the positive aspects that held members together even when life in the community became unbearable. In Fondakowski's words, "[T]he organizing principle of the piece ended up being '*What happened to the dream?*' But first in order for them (the audience) to appreciate that question and the loss of the dream, you had to build the dream. A big part of building the dream, a big part, was the music" (Fondakowski Interview). Fondakowski utilizes music in order to create utopian performatives that demonstrate the exhilaration of living in this socialist utopian community. While the Temple was an example of the dangers of isolation and emotional control, it was also an example of engaged and purposeful communal living. Members did more than just worship on Sundays. They chose to live their spiritual ideals by creating their own family and their own world. Only by experiencing the euphoria of this world, through vibrant live music, could one begin to see how difficult it would be to let go of that utopia once it began to turn into dystopia.

To that end, monologues in Act I focus on "building the dream" by explaining the Temple's history, growth, and the circumstances under which members met Jones and/or joined the Temple. Phil Tracy, one of the earliest Temple members, explains that Jones came to California after being ostracized in his home state of Indiana for establishing a racially integrated

congregation (Fondakowski et al. 6). Following Tracy's account, additional members, including disenfranchised African-Americans, runaway teenagers, and Vietnam veterans, share their journey to the Temple and how they established families and lifelong relationships in this community (4–39). In Act II the audience learns about the “loss of the dream.” Despite the Temple's powerful role in San Francisco and California politics, questions from journalists and concerned family members pressured Jones to move the group to Guyana to fully realize his vision of a post-racial, socialist utopia (40–83).

Designed by Sarah Lambert, *The People's Temple* set consisted of shelves filled with 1000 boxes underneath two steeples. Each box contained replicas of the actual belongings of temple members (Fondakowski 319). Velina Brown clarified that each box on stage represented a person who died in Jonestown and contained an approximation of their belongings. Brown describes the impact of the lights coming up and the audience seeing the almost 1000 boxes, which illustrated the magnitude of the loss (Brown Interview). In Act II the actors physically converted the “archive” to create a space that alluded to the open-air pavilion that served as the main communal gathering place in Jonestown and the location where the majority of the congregation died (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 277).

During the course of the play, actors attached over-sized passport photos of Jonestown victims to each box, “so that by the end of the play most of the boxes were adorned with the faces of the people” (Fondakowski 319). Fondakowski recalls the audience's reaction to this element of the set:

After each performance, many audience members were drawn toward the front of the house, making their way onto the stage to walk among the shelves, to reflect and view the photos. The set . . . had become an accidental, yet powerful, art

installation. As artists, we were very pleased when Becky Moore (a family member of several Jonestown victims) pointed out, “You let us see their faces, not just their bodies lying face down in the jungle. Their faces were upright.” (319)

Through a set piece/art installation, these items did the important work of restaging the final picture of the people of Peoples Temple. This was a reimagining of the final image of the deaths in Jonestown. In the weeks that followed the tragedy, images of dead bodies face down on the ground circulated widely, including on the December 4, 1978 cover of *Newsweek*. The issue was titled “Special Report: The Cult of Death” (Kosner). The play’s re-imagining of that image is therefore an act of adaptation that attempts, in Rebecca Schneider’s words, “the touching of time” through re-creations that are fully aware of their deliberate failure or slippage (Rebecca Schneider 31). Instead of remembering them through the highly circulated images of nameless victims lying face down in Jonestown, audience members were able to revisit this moment in history and see the faces of distinct individuals who were also members of a community.

Another re-creation is the final scene in which characters enter the stage space describing the last evening of Jonestown while placing clothing of deceased Temple members onto the stage. The show ends with the entire cast on the stage. While the ensemble sings *Walk a Mile in My Shoes*, from the Peoples Temple’s gospel album, the clothing on stage evokes the ghosts of Temple members’ dead bodies. The show’s finale is simultaneously an artistic re-telling of the deaths and a moving celebration of their lives through song.

The sound design was just as critical as the set design in this final moment. By contrasting the energetic gospel and pop music of the Temple’s choir with the clothing of dead bodies on stage, the actors encouraged the audience to question what they think they know about Peoples Temple. Audience members may have considered the incongruity of what they saw and

heard. Would people filled with joy and fellowship, for instance, take their own lives rather than continue their lives outside this community? They might have also wondered if the music became a false representation of happiness to others in the final days of the Temple. Or was music making an act of agency that expressed the congregation's commitment to the collective despite the outside world's focus on an individual figurehead? Through singing, the show performs and shares the Temple's little-known repertoire and troubles accepted notions of the quality of Temple members' lives and dedication to one another.

Devising *The People's Temple*

This 2005 production began in 2002 when Berkeley Rep, in collaboration with Z Space Studio, both prominent theatres in the San Francisco Bay Area, commissioned Fondakowski to create a piece to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Jonestown tragedy. David Dower, the then artistic director of Z Space, and his wife Denice Stephenson, who would become the project's lead researcher, were good friends with the Reverend John Moore and his wife Barbara, who appear in the play. The Moores lost their two daughters and their grandson in Jonestown (*SFGate*). Margo Hall lost four family friends in Jonestown and would go on to portray one of them, Marthea Hicks, in the piece (Fondakowski et al.). Fondakowski had previously collaborated with Berkeley Rep on the west coast premiere of Tectonic's *The Laramie Project*, allowing these Bay Area artists to feel comfortable placing this extremely personal exploration in her hands.

Fondakowski stated that initially she was reluctant to take on another emotionally taxing and controversial topic after working on *The Laramie Project*, which explored the aftermath of

the brutal murder of Mathew Shepard. But the successful utilization of documentary theatre in *The Laramie Project* also inspired her to further explore the possibilities of the genre. She states,

[T]his experiment with *Laramie*, allowing a community to speak for itself, it was a very successful experiment. And there was a lot more drama in it than you could ever make up. So coming off of that I was still very interested in that experiment, of communities speaking for themselves. (Fondakowski Interview)

One could take issue with Fondakowski's assertion that through documentary theatre a community is able to "speak for itself." While the words being used come from interviews and artifacts produced by the community, it is the artist who edits, curates, and frames the narrative. But given that reality, documentary theatre does offer the opportunity for a multiplicity of community members to "speak for themselves," thereby creating a multidimensional, nuanced and even at times conflicting story. And it was those conflicting and contrasting messages that ultimately drew Fondakowski to tell the story of Peoples Temple.

In order to disrupt conventional understandings of the Jonestown tragedy, the production conveyed specific unknown or forgotten facts about Peoples Temple. "The original impulse," Fondakowski states, "was to follow the thread, the question as to the contrast between what I knew from history. We just followed that thread to see what happens" (Fondakowski Interview). By following that thread, the play reminded viewers that before the Temple was labeled as a *cult*, it was a well-regarded, politically progressive, Christian church serving primarily marginalized citizens. The play makes the argument that if indeed temple members were fooled by Jones, so were powerful political and cultural leaders who appointed him to the San Francisco Housing Authority, the Human Rights Commission, and welcoming delegations for visiting dignitaries,

such as then vice presidential candidate Walter Mondale, and later First Lady Rosalyn Carter (40–44). Jones, in other words, fooled us all.

In her book *Stories From Jonestown*, an expanded collection of the interviews conducted for the play, Fondakowski notes the need to use performance to revisit and reconsider this moment in history. She writes,

[W]hy can't history hold on to what has been discovered since that day, for example, that many people in Jonestown did not actually die at their own hand. Both murder and suicide took place that day in 1978—the cyanide mixture was injected as well as ingested—and the decision to die was not made by Jim Jones alone.” (Fondakowski xix)

Through performance, Fondakowski and her collaborators added and shared new information and layers to the story of Peoples Temple. Audience members then encountered this dynamic piece of history as well as new information in a memorable and visceral form.

Margo Hall expressed a need to expand the Temple's archive by stating that “[m]ost of the archival information was about Jones. We knew that the temple was 80% African American. We were constantly trying to get more minority voices, but those were the ones that were missing because those were the ones that died” (Hall Interview). Therefore, one of the purposes of the play—and much of documentary theatre—is to expand the archive. As Carol Martin describes it, building on her critique of the archive, documentary theatre can respond to the “operations of power” in the historical record and “create additional historical accounts,” and “at its best, it offers us a way to think about disturbing contexts and complicated subject matter while revealing the virtues and flaws of its sources” (Martin 12). Given this description, documentary theatre was the ideal genre for *The People's Temple*, whose creators wanted to

facilitate community dialogue rather than produce a definitive narrative. In interviews and press releases, the creators and cast embraced the ethnically diverse, politically progressive, and class-conscious perspective of the show and its genre, or as Martin describes, “as staged politics, specific instances of documentary theatre construct the past in service of a future the authors would like to create” (10). So, while the play walks the fine line of valorizing the Temple’s socialist ideals as espoused by Jones, it doesn’t shy away from presenting the quest for utopia as part of the Temple’s downfall (“*The People’s Temple at Berkeley Rep*”).

Like many works of documentary theatre, *The People’s Temple* does not focus on why or how the tragedy occurred, but rather the implications, themes, impacts, and lost moments of the event. The goals of the project were to “create a conversation between the living and the dead,” and to “find healing in the process . . . with the candor only hindsight can provide” (“*The People’s Temple at Berkeley Rep*”). “The question could not be, *What needs to be told?*” Fondakowski writes, “However ethically bound we felt to history, the question had to multiply and become *What do we as artists want to share? What do we have to contribute to the conversation and canon of Jonestown?*” (Fondakowski 318). To that end, the play is a loose chronology, told in a series of monologues, sometimes intercut with other monologues to create a dialogue, or what the Tectonic Theatre Project calls a *moment*. Moments are “individual, self-contained theatrical units” that can be sequenced into “theatrical phrases or sentences that will eventually become a play” (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 29). These moments were formed exclusively from interviews, letters, newspaper articles, and other archival materials and then augmented with slides indicating time and location, as well as film clips and audio recordings from the Peoples Temple archive (“*The People’s Temple, on Stage*”).

Fondakowski describes Moment Work, the term coined by Tectonic Theatre Project, as a process of deep listening, or in her words: “A very rigorous study and analysis of material and what you’re really trying to do is allow the material to teach you what it wants to be. Allow for theatrical poetry to emerge” (Fondakowski Interview). The Moment Work devising method is one of the reasons I see *The People’s Temple* as sharing a genealogy with documentary theater pieces such as Tectonic’s *The Laramie Project* and the works of Anna Deavere Smith. In the introduction to *Fires in the Mirror* Smith writes of her method, “In fact, everyone, in a given amount of time, will say something that is like poetry.” While Smith did not specifically use Moment Work, her process is also one of deep and analytical listening conducted with an ear for poetic language.

In addition to identifying artistically engaging segments of text, Moment Work is also curating moments to build a dramatic arc. “The real impact,” Fondakowski shared with me, “comes from selecting the little sections of each interview and putting them together to give the story an engine. It gives the story, it gives people's words something to bounce off of, it creates a tension, it creates a dynamism that allows for the audience to experience a theatrical event” (Fondakowski Interview). So, while the documents themselves provide factual information, the benefit of documentary theatre is that the impact of the information is magnified and made accessible through an artistic experience.

Documentary Performance as Community Dialogue

Actors experienced the ghost of Jonestown on and off the stage. In addition to post-play and community discussions, actors often found themselves in informal conversations with playgoers. Velina Brown recalled that audience members frequently approached her on her train

ride home from the theatre. In fact, one evening a doctor spoke to her about Jim Jones's mother, Lynetta Putnam, whom he had treated before she left for Guyana. He expressed guilt and regret to Brown as he wondered if there was something he could have done to stop Putnam from leaving (Brown Interview). This incident provides an example of how the play encouraged community members to engage with these incidents inside as well as outside of the theatre.

To further help the public grapple with this chapter of their shared local history, Berkeley Rep organized educational projects and civic conversation throughout the run of *The People's Temple*. Berkeley Rep's Performance Lab, part of its education programs, produced an educational guide for schools to "help teachers meet the arts requirement by using Berkeley Rep productions as a framework for study" (Lee). As stated in the educational guide "[i]n performance lab students learn, create, and perform an original piece based on TPT (*The People's Temple*) . . . at five Bay Area high Schools" (Lee). Utilizing information and activities from the educational guide and attending student matinees of *The People's Temple*, high school students were also charged with creating their own documentary theatre piece. In fact, Sarah Leonard, Berkeley Rep's Literary Manager, recalls attending the play as a high school student. While she doesn't remember specific moments from the play or school activities associated with it, she does recall feeling moved by the performance and shocked by a history she had never known (Leonard Interview).

Several performances of *The People's Temple* were followed by post-play discussions. Ten community discussions about Peoples Temple, media, religious extremism, and the play itself were led by local artists, scholars, and community leaders in Berkeley, San Francisco, Santa Rosa, and Ukiah; all cities with strong ties to Peoples Temple (*SFGate*). Berkeley Rep also offered a free docent program for groups who wanted a "trained docent" to lead a one-hour

discussion either before or after the show. Groups of fifteen or more could receive discounted tickets as well as the opportunity for a private post-play discussion, tour, or reception (“*The People’s Temple* at Berkeley Rep”).

Through these events and education projects, these artists used *The People’s Temple* to create a site for discussions that had been deferred until then. As stated earlier, the murder of San Francisco’s mayor, George Moscone, and the first openly gay member of the Board of Supervisors, Harvey Milk, only nine days after the events in Jonestown left the Bay Area reeling. Donnerter Lane, leader of the Council of San Francisco Churches in 1978 and of the effort to bring victims’ bodies from Guyana to United States, described that period as “chaos.” In her interview for *The People’s Temple*, she proclaimed, “There was a political war going on in the city” (Fondakowski 300). Indeed, the trial of Milk’s and Moscone’s murder, former Supervisor Dan White, his infamous “twinkie” defense, and his controversial manslaughter conviction fueled political tensions and dominated public discourse (“*The People’s Temple*, on Stage”). Interestingly, that moment in history was the subject of Emily Mann’s *Execution of Justice*, another work of documentary theatre (Mann).

Fondakowski witnessed these community conversations and described them as sites where recognition and healing could begin. She describes the leap of faith survivors and victims’ families took when they agreed to participate in the project.

[A] lot of people didn't talk about it. [T]hey took the chance and they talked about it and the audience received it well. I think everybody (survivors and victims’ families) felt respected by us, but it was more the audiences’ reception where people thought, “Okay they’re not going to just call us crazy and dismiss us, they’re going to hear what we have to say.” I do think that the community

experience in Berkeley was a turning point for a lot of people to feel more comfortable talking about their history. (Fondakowski Interview)

The act of being interviewed for the play opened the door for many former Temple members and the families of the deceased to discuss a history that they had not shared for decades. Attending the play and seeing the respect with which the artists and the audience received the material further prepared community members to continue that dialogue. Berkeley Rep also organized community discussions in cities that had had large numbers of Temple members, which created a space for difficult, deferred conversations that could facilitate understanding and possibly healing. Pairing documentary theater with site-specific civic dialogue is a model that can be replicated to avoid exploiting personal trauma and facilitate responsible and respectful engagement with sensitive material.

In fact, Fondakowski posits that the immediacy and intimacy of live theater was the ideal vehicle for sharing documentary artifacts. “There's something interesting about hearing the tapes,” she states, “going back and hearing the voices. Something very striking about that encounter, the interview with the person” (Fondakowski Interview). The recordings used in the play bring to life Temple members as individuals and a community, not just nameless, faceless victims. In the course of the play the audience learns not just the story of the Temple—a story they believe they already know—but also stories of individual lives. For example, they meet Hyacinth Thrash and her sister Zipporah Edwards, two African American women who joined the Temple after seeing their integrated choir singing on television.

Fondakowski has been so taken with the potency of these recordings, both archival and interviews conducted for the play, that she hopes to one day create a database where the public can access them.

One dream that I have is to digitize the tapes and have a database where you could . . . sit there for a really long time and listen to them. But it would be a very rare person who would spend that kind of time. But there's a lot of people who would sit for two hours in the theater and hear a multiplicity of voices and have an experience. So, I think the theater does that kind of storytelling really well. [I]n film you can't have like seventeen characters, I mean you could but it would be a confusing film. (Fondakowski Interview)

Although she wants to share the dynamism of the recordings themselves, she recognizes that building a live theater experience that frames and exhibits the recordings is the most effective way to have a large number of people hear and understand them. Documentary theatre is ideally positioned to breathe life into artifacts and display the “liveness” of recordings and music from Peoples Temples’ repertoire. A documentary performance can be a way to bring the archive and the repertoire together and to hold people’s attention for a reasonable amount of time. Audience members cannot learn the complexities of Temple life by reading a short article, nor are they likely, as Fondakowski mentions, to sit for hours and cull through archival documents and recordings, but they might sit in for two hours and fifty minutes in rapt attention for a well-crafted play. In this way documentary theater can have a pedagogical or popular education function, not unlike the EGH project described in the previous chapter.

Critical Reception

The People’s Temple was a critical success at Berkeley Rep and also received laudatory reviews when the production moved to Perseverance Theatre in Juneau, Alaska, and the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Chosen by a panel of Bay Area theatre critics, Berkeley

Rep's production received the prestigious Will Glickman Award for Best New Play in the Bay Area of 2006 (Will Glickman Award, Theatre Bay Area). The review of the Berkeley Rep production that appeared in *Variety* on May 9, 2005 reads:

Indeed, *The People's Temple's* most striking achievement may be its vivid evocation of Jones' and the church's magnetism. Their utopian vision for a new American society seemed so genuine that the majority of converts were African Americans, whose ongoing civil-rights struggles might well have rendered suspect any other gift given by a white man. (Harvey)

An equally positive review of the Guthrie Theater production was published on backstage.com in January 2006:

Yet *The People's Temple* always comes back to the people, and its dozen performers bring each of the more than 30 characters to full-dimensional life. That's important. While the show's first production at Berkeley Repertory Theatre in California could connect to an audience for whom the events of Jonestown were arguably more immediate, productions in the rest of the country need to rely on the sections of the material that are universal: the quest for the spiritual, for a community, for a better life. This comes through in nearly all the characters as we learn why they joined with Jones and why — even when things went horribly wrong — they remained. We are reminded that many of these vibrant characters on stage will soon be reduced to memories, to a few stray items in a white cardboard box. (Huyck)

These two reviews provide an accurate representative sample of the critical assessment of the original production. Some reviews noted what a few critics saw as minor flaws with the play,

such as its two hour and 50-minute running time, the repetition of certain facts about the Temple by various characters, and the use of joyful music to shy away from the most difficult aspects of the story. But overall, the reviews consistently noted the wealth of “distinct” and “dimensional” characters portrayed and the cast’s ability to capture the energy of Temple life. By presenting a myriad of stories from Jonestown, the productions represented the diversity of the congregation, gave identities to otherwise anonymous victims, and provided a window into the lure of Peoples Temple.

In addition to the Berkeley Rep production and tour with the majority of the original cast, Fondakowski directed a 2008 production of *The People’s Temple* with an entirely new cast at American Theater Company in Chicago (“*The People’s Temple*,” *American Theater Company, Chicago*). The Puzzle Piece Theatre in Ferndale, Michigan produced the play with a new cast and director during their 2017 season (“*The People’s Temple*”). While these productions have added to the Peoples Temple repertoire, two books from this project have added to its archive. In 2005 Denise Stephenson, lead researcher on the Berkeley Rep production, published *Dear People: Remembering Jonestown*, a collection of new and previously collected letters, photos, personal histories, and documents (Stephenson). The aforementioned *Stories from Jonestown* by Fondakowski was published in 2013 and contains long-form transcriptions of interviews conducted for the play as well as her insights on the development of the project (Fondakowski). Most recently, Fondakowski discusses the devising of *The Peoples Temple* in a section of the 2018 book *Moment Work: Tectonic Theater Project’s Process of Devising Theater* by Moisés Kaufman and Barbara Pitts McAdams (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams). These new documents point to the cyclical nature of documentary theatre. Documents are gathered and used to create art. The art itself not only becomes a document added to the archive, but also inspires the

creation of new documents that continue this process. In fact, in the introductory section of *Stories from Jonestown* Fondakowski describes the book as “an extension of the life of the play” (Fondakowski xx). Since the script has not been published, though, the play’s life in the professional theatre world has been stunted.

The Afterlife of *The People’s Temple*

Despite critical acclaim, awards, and audience enthusiasm for *The People’s Temple*, the play script remains unpublished. Fondakowski retains the rights to the script and when contacted by high schools and colleges she sends them a digital copy of the script and directs them to her lawyer to pay a nominal fee per performance. When asked why *The People’s Temple* has not been performed by more regional theaters Fondakowski responded,

Unfortunately plays in America, even really good plays, I mean this is a good play, I’m not just saying that because I created it, I have written many other plays and this was by far the strongest work. If a play doesn’t go to New York and doesn’t get reviewed in *The New York Times* it’s not considered a great American play. It’s not considered a play worthy of being performed in regional theatres and different places. Because it was cut short in Berkeley, it did stunt its potential to have a life in New York. (Fondakowski Interview)

So, while the play was a success in other cities, its longevity and the marketability across the country depended on a New York run. Commercial success is the only type of success that matters if one is trying to expose the most people to a work of documentary theatre.

Fondakowski’s comments point to the double-edged sword of doing this kind of documentary performance in the regional/commercial theater setting. As the most well-known regional theatre

in the Area, Berkeley Rep had the clout and perhaps even the responsibility to produce this piece. Survivors and victims' families may have chosen to participate because the project was facilitated by a well-known and reputable theatre company. Berkeley Rep also had the resources to commission an established documentary theatre artist like Fondakowski, which added additional credibility to the endeavor. Audiences and critics took the piece seriously and saw it, even though they knew the horrific ending, possibly because it had Berkeley Rep's "stamp of approval." The company also had the stable subscriber base to ensure that the play would be seen even if it were not critically acclaimed. In fact, Fondakowski believes that Berkeley Rep's reputation made not just the play but also the community dialogues possible. "[P]eople hold up Berkeley Rep as a place of professionalism and dignity," she states. "That made a really big difference in legitimizing the discourse. Their stake in it said *It's ok for us to look at this. It's good for us to look at this*" (Fondakowski Interview). She also shares that Berkeley Rep initially did not want to collaborate with Z Space on the play but felt a responsibility that may have overruled their misgivings. According to Fondakowski, Tony Taccone, Berkeley Rep's then Artistic Director, expressed some initial ambivalence about the project. She states, "It's like *Who's going to want to see a play about Jonestown?* [A]s he (Taccone) reflected on it he was like, *But if not us then who?* We're the largest regional theatre to so many of the survivors. We have to do it, it's like a moral imperative" (Fondakowski Interview).

Fondakowski credits Berkeley Rep's association with the project with both the play's creation and its limited exposure. She states, "[F]or them (Berkeley Rep), it was a risk to make a piece about Jonestown. . . . [W]e certainly didn't vindicate anyone, but it could feel to some people like we were putting forth a positive view of a horrible tragedy" (Fondakowski Interview). In order to offer a multifaceted and nuanced exploration of Peoples Temple,

Fondakowski and her collaborators produced a piece that might make some uncomfortable. The play celebrated the love and fellowship members cultivated through their communal lifestyle rather than condemning all aspects of the Temple. Doing so was a more honest portrayal of history as Jones himself was a respected civic leader prior to the tragedy. But this more nuanced treatment could upset some and perhaps even feel like a vindication, to use Fondakowski's words. In fact, the play details how Jones was able to deploy hundreds of congregation members at a moment's notice to protests and political rallies. This type of guaranteed "turn out" made Jones an ally to many progressive politicians and activists. Remembering Jones' connection to progressive politics may have been difficult for audience members to hear, especially those who take pride in living in the politically progressive San Francisco Bay Area. But the benefit of documentary performance is that utilizing a multiplicity of artifacts and interviews that illuminate multiple points of view challenges notions of definitive "good guys" and "bad guys."

Such a complex message may be less comfortable for audience members and less commercially viable for theatres. "[I]t could have had a bigger life," Fondakowski shares,

The play could have kept running in San Francisco but Berkeley Rep didn't want to take it. . . . It had an audience to keep running and they (Berkeley Rep) didn't want to, they didn't want us to keep running. I think that they had pushback from some of their subscribers or people on the board or whatever, that this play was, you know, endorsing cults or wasn't heavy handed enough. I think they (Berkeley Rep) didn't want to get involved in the controversy. (Fondakowski Interview)

Continuing the run of the play at Berkeley Rep or in San Francisco may have created more time and opportunity for the show to come to the attention of New York producers. *The People's*

Temple had the same exposure at Berkeley Rep as the West Coast Premiere of *The Laramie Project* (“Laramie Project Makes West Coast Premiere at Berkeley Rep May 18-July 8”). Both enjoyed runs that lasted approximately seven weeks each (“*The People’s Temple* at Berkeley Rep”). The main difference was that *The Laramie Project* came to Berkeley Rep after a successful run in New York. Perhaps *The Laramie Project*, which explored the impact of the horrific hate crime in Laramie, Wyoming, did not impact Bay Area audiences on such a personal level. Those conversations about civic response and responsibility did not implicate the local community. Ultimately, Berkeley Rep’s dedication to *The People’s Temple* provided resources and legitimacy that made the play and the ensuing community conversations not just possible but also a powerful “intersection of social dialogue and art” (Fondakowski Interview). But the pressures of sustaining a commercially viable regional theatre may have caused Berkeley Rep to step away from the complex and at times controversial narrative the incident required. After the play, Fondakowski was approached by the producers of a television series chronicling Peoples Temple titled *Cult of Personality*—a project she referred to as “[T]he same old tried and true narrative like Jones with his sunglasses, brooding, drinking his Kool-Aid. It’s just not reality” (Fondakowski Interview).

Devising as Feminist Practice

In the previous chapter I considered how devising, particularly in community-based performance, is based in some values of Women of Color Feminist thought, particularly the emphasis on process, not just product, and the porous nature of roles. Artists as well as community members can serve in multiple roles (e.g., performer, writer, director, or dramaturge) at various points in the devising process. I note a similar ethic in the development of *The*

People's Temple and in my interview with Fondakowski I asked her if she identified herself as a feminist director and Moment Work or devising as a feminist mode of art making. She replied by sharing that she had recently sat on a panel for Feminist Directors and was asked to describe her process. She responded, “I really feel like my job as director is to create community, to bring people together in a safe space to be their best selves in a functioning community. And I said I do think that’s a feminist idea—to engage and to co-create” (Fondakowski Interview).

Fondakowski’s efforts to create a “safe space” and build community echoes the Women of Color notion of *convivencia*, or the “deliberate convening [that] builds community, creates a context for social justice work, and inspires new forms of knowledge” (Habell-Pallán et al. 68). By creating a space where artist and community contributors can safely share and co-create, Fondakowski’s directorial approach leads to community building and values a collaborative and ethical process as well as a quality artistic outcome. Under her leadership, artists and the community members they interviewed encountered “new forms of knowledge” by bringing archival material to light, performing the Temple’s repertoire (their music and word) and continuing their dialogue throughout the development and run of the production. This engaged mode of devising also echoes PearlDamour’s signature methodology of “just spending time in the community” (Pearl Interview 2019).

Fondakowski is also quick to point out that often a feminist mode of working can be considered less rigorous and disciplined. She responds to that cliché by stating,

[W]hen you try to slap the name feminist on it then it becomes, “Oh it’s all egalitarian, there’s no hierarchy.” Oh no, it’s disciplined, there’s leadership. Oh no, there’s a hierarchy; it’s just that everyone has a place at the table. [I] think it is

hard for people to imagine a world where both can be true. (Fondakowski Interview)

Her desire to not just “imagine a world” but create an artistic space where both rigor and equity are held in equal regard is a utopian move because she is envisioning her ideal way of working or “co-creating” and putting it into practice. Pearl Damour, whom I also identify as working in a feminist mode, shared a similar vision for the balance of ethical process and high-quality artistic outcomes. In one of my interviews with Katie Pearl she stated, “[d]welling in community is important but there is something important about craft. As artists, creating an artistic product is a core component of this experience. Without it the experience would feel incomplete. The show is part of the plan.” What Fondakowski names “discipline” and “hierarchy” Katie Pearl calls “craft.” Building a safe and collaborative relationship among the artistic team and with community contributors informs and fuels the final piece. The high standards for the quality of the process translate into high standards for the artistic merit of the product.

Conclusion

Documentary theatre, as a form of performative historiography, uses the archive and the repertoire simultaneously to disrupt accepted narratives, expand the archive, and occasionally facilitate much-needed and long-deferred community conversations. While documentary theatre is not an ideal term because it connotes *truth* or a telling of *the real story*, the genre offers a vehicle for examining many versions of a story and the archival and repertoirc sources that generate each version. *The People’s Temple* is an example of theatre used to revisit the past and complicate the convenient explanations we tell ourselves. The play and its devising process expand the archive by capturing diverse and hidden voices and do so by utilizing utopian

performatives and a feminist perspective that values process as well as product. Lastly, the show and the associated educational and civic events demonstrate how performance can facilitate difficult but healing discourse. In *The People's Temple*, the character of Dick Tropp, a Temple member who collected oral histories for the group, reiterates the need to continue to reencounter the past, especially the most painful and inexplicable moments. He reads an anonymous letter written in Jonestown on the evening of November 18, 1978, "Collect all the tapes, all the writings, all the history. The story of this movement, this action, must be examined, over and over" (Fondakowski et al. 74).

Chapter Three: Documentary Performance in the Feminist Activist Diaspora

Every fight is a gesture. And every gesture is a performance.

Maria Alyokhina, Pussy Riot

La Ciudad de las Ideas, Puebla, Mexico, November 2015

Introduction

In Chapter One I focused on documentary performance as a vehicle for critical pedagogy, civic engagement, and local coalition building. Chapter Two expands the scope of documentary performance to consider the ways, specifically documentary theatre, can and has addressed national and community trauma. In this chapter, I explore documentary performance made possible by the ubiquity of personal recording devices, access to editing software, and the global reach of platforms such as YouTube. This Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethic is ubiquitous within the punk rock and Riot Grrrl culture from which the Russian protest collective Pussy Riot takes their inspiration. Born in Olympia, Washington in the 1990s, the Riot Grrrl movement gave birth to an international network of women creating punk bands and associated zines (DIY fan magazines) to combat sexism and discuss issues of “rape, domestic abuse, women’s health, sexuality and, above all, female empowerment” (Dunn 320). The movement grew in tandem with third wave feminism, and Pussy Riot has identified themselves as “Russian Riot Grrrls” (329). In this chapter I detail how Pussy Riot and a group of Mexican artists used technology and documentary performance to engage in a transnational/translocal exchange and become fourth wave feminist Riot Grrrls.

To that end, I examine Pussy Riot’s two videos documenting the performance that led to their arrest in 2012 and a video titled #Freepussyriot México that Mexican artists, including

musicians and the singers Lucía Escobar Torres, Olinka Gil Amezcua, and Karina Figueroa Lima created in response to the arrest (*#Freepussyriot México*). I contend that through documentary performance these artists and activists tapped into layered meanings and rich histories that connect these seemingly disconnected groups and in so doing, revealed and reinforced a transnational feminist network, a global iteration of *convivencia*, the deliberate convening of individuals to conduct collective social justice work and art making (Gonzalez 3).

While the members of Pussy Riot may not have intended to build a transnational network of feminist activists, or highlight one that already existed, they did just that by documenting their acts of resistance and sharing them on the Internet. In the tradition of feminist art collective Guerrilla Girls and Riot Grrrl band and zine artists Bikini Kill, Pussy Riot sparked a transnational network fighting for “Revolution Girl-Style Now!” (Dunn and Farnsworth 140). What started as a protest against the specific ills of the authoritarian Russian regime under Vladimir Putin and corruption in the Russian Orthodox Church became a rallying cry against oppressive patriarchal systems found in many nations, including Mexico (Gutterman; Alpert; Fernandez de Castro; Krol; McGowan: Taylor, "Pussy Riot: Dissent").

Pussy Riot produced two videos from the footage of their performance at Cathedral of Christ the Saviour; the one minute and thirty-four second unedited recording of their performance, (timurnechaev77) and the almost two-minute music video with edited images from the performance and a complete version of the song “Punk Prayer” (Freedom Requires Wings). In the former, which I will hereafter refer to as the *cathedral video*, viewers witness Pussy Riot’s attempt to perform their song “Punk Prayer” on the dais of the ornate Russian Orthodox cathedral, the largest in Moscow, as an act of protest against the Russian President, Vladimir Putin. The video also documents men physically attempting to restrain Pussy Riot and bystanders

looking on in shock and confusion. In contrast, the Pussy Riot “Punk Prayer” music video is a fully realized product of the group’s artistic vision. The viewer hears the entirety of the song “Punk Prayer,” and scenes from the cathedral video are intercut with shots of the band playing and singing the song uninterrupted. While these two videos were filmed in Russia, the other two videos I analyze in this chapter were filmed in Mexico.

Posted on YouTube on 12 December 2012, #Freepussyriot México is a response to Pussy Riot’s incarceration and, I contend, to the two aforementioned Pussy Riot videos. In it, Mexican musicians and singers document themselves recording an original song, in Spanish, that mirrors the conceit of “Punk Prayer”—a prayer to the Virgin Mary. This video is composed of scenes in a recording studio as well as inside and outside Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, a celebrated Catholic church in Mexico City. The final video I treat in this chapter is the recording from *La Ciudad de las Ideas* (CDI) conference in Puebla, Mexico, where Pussy Riot member Maria Alyokhina gave a speech in 2015 (CDI 2015, The Glam Belle). Alyokhina’s speech clearly articulates Pussy Riot’s utopian and transnational feminist vision through her words and the audience participation she uses to emphasize her message. While the first three recordings illustrate an on-line transnational feminist network, the final video documents a moment when the *virtual* network leaves the liminal space of the Internet. The online *convivencia*, or participatory artistic exchange, becomes physically actualized.

Before beginning my thick description and close reading of each video, I will map out the methodological and theoretical lenses I am using to frame my examination of each performance. I also provide historical and cultural contexts for these videos. My purpose is to identify documentary elements shared between these groups as proof of a transnational network I am calling a feminist activist diaspora. Inspired by the work of scholar Gayatri Gopinath, I am

queering the meaning of diaspora to decolonize the term and distance it from its Eurocentric meaning. By disconnecting it from nation-states established by colonial borders, Gopinath decolonizes the term diaspora, which I will explain in more detail in the following pages (Gopinath 6–18). This use of diaspora recognizes that while these feminist activists are not from the same physical location, they do share the same ideological space. These feminists embrace the third wave US feminist notion of intersectionality, or women’s layered and intersecting oppressions based on race, class, gender, and ability, and have expanded it to what Shelly Grabe calls transnational intersectionality. Grabe writes, “Transnational intersectionality places importance on the intersections among gender, ethnicity, sexuality, economic exploitation, and other social hierarchies in the context of the empire-building or imperialist policies characterized by historical and emergent global capitalism. (Grabe and Else-Quest 159). While intersectionality, as conceptualized by legal and critical race scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, recognizes the multiple oppressions women face, it does so from a western gaze that universalizes women’s experiences. In contrast, transnational intersectionality cites the additional layers of colonialism and globalization that renders unique forms of gender discrimination and violence around the world. In this case study, critical transnationalism can be illustrated by the language and genres used by each group of artists. The Mexican artists pay tribute to Pussy Riot not through punk music, but through their own folk music form, Son Jorocho. Sung in Spanish, their song speaks of their own forms of oppression which are similar to Pussy Riot’s, but distinct. Instead of the Russian Orthodox church, #Freepussyriot México centers the Catholic church, and instead of the authoritarianism of Vladimir Putin, they sing about government corruption by the 71-year reign of Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

Sparked by outrage over the Anita Hill hearings, which highlighted the ubiquity of gender discrimination, US third wave feminists focused on the multiple forms of oppression women face. The hearings illustrated the dismissal, humiliation, and vilification of those who report sexual harassment. Years of sexualized misconduct were detailed in these televised hearings. Race, class, and institutional power were ever present themes as an accomplished, well-educated Black woman levied harassment claims against an educated and accomplished Black man seeking a permanent seat on the US Supreme Court. In response, Rebecca Walker's 1992 article "Becoming the Third Wave" proclaimed,

Let Thomas' confirmation serve to remind you, as it did me, that the fight is far from over. Turn that outrage into political power. Do not vote for them unless they work for us. Do not have sex with them, do not break bread with them, do not nurture them if they don't prioritize our freedom to control our bodies and our lives. I am not a post-feminism feminist. I am the Third Wave. (Walker 39)

Riot Grrrls embraced that notion of a separate space for women in their own manifesto by urging women to "create revolution in our own lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the bullshit Christian capitalist way of doing things" (Weiss and Hanna 331). For Riot Grrrls, to "assimilate to someone else's (boy) standards of what is or isn't" was not their aim (331). They needed to create cultural material and non-hierarchical forms of being that spoke to their lives and worldview. In the Riot Grrrl Manifesto, written by members of the Riot Grrrl band Bikini Kill including Kathleen Hanna, they write,

BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that
WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways.

BECAUSE we wanna make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other.

BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings.

BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how what we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo. (330-331)

Manifestos are inherently utopian, as they call for the creating of new worlds, and the Riot Grrrl manifesto is no different. It articulates the creativity, accessibility, and disruption celebrated by punk music and activism, and takes that ethos a step further by naming the shared nature of women's oppression and the connected networks needed to combat it.

Written in the 1990s, the manifesto and the Grrrl Riot movement itself is indebted to early female punk pioneers of the 1970s such as Chicana legend Alice Bag. Born Alice Armendariz Valasquez to Mexican immigrant parents in East Los Angeles, she injected Mexican musical sounds and the emotional charged *estilo-bravío* (wild style) of Mexican singing into her punk performances (Habell-Pallán, "Death to Racism" 250). By performing traditional Mexican songs known as *canciones rancheras* in her punk style and performing punk music in *estilo-bravío*, she created a genre called punkchera (Alconada and Sainz 89). In the words of Chicana punk rock expert Michelle Habell-Pallán, "Alice both punkified *estilo bravío*, and *estilo bravío*—fied punk, creating a brand-new subgenre of punk (258). This type of innovation is an example of the "both/and" attitude that Diana Taylor marks as a Latinx decolonial strategy (Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* 96). I discuss Mexican instances of both/and later in this chapter.

Female-centered cultural production and activism and intersectional discourse become transnational with the advent of the Internet. Fourth wave feminism has come into being in part through on-line activism such as The Everyday Sexism Project (*Everyday Sexism Project*). In 2012, 27-year-old Laura Bates created this on-line forum for women around the world to catalogue instances of sexism in their everyday lives. By its first anniversary the project had collected tens of thousands of testimonies from women in 17 countries (Cochrane). In her article “Agitating for Change: Theatre and a Feminist ‘Network of Resistance,’” Elaine Aston chronicles how theater and performance during this period enacted feminist “networks of resistance” similar to what I am calling a feminist activist diaspora (Aston 6). One performance that, like The Everyday Sexism Project, crossed borders was the playwright Eve Ensler’s One Billion Rising flash mob, which Aston refers to as “feminist-theatre resistance” (12). The annual event first took place on 14 February 2013, with flash mobs around the world performing the same choreography in order to demand an end to violence that statistically affects one in three women worldwide (12). Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term intersectionality described the simultaneous demonstration in various global locations as “intersectionality in action” (12). Aston argues that “One Billion appears to exemplify feminism rising through a broad-based constituency in a way that allows for differentiated sites of participatory resistance to forge links with each other” (12). The Everyday Sexism Project and One Billion Rising both embrace the third wave feminist notions of intersectional identity and distinct moments/narratives of activism around the world. By utilizing the tools of fourth wave feminism, technology and the Internet, to promote, organize and document the international flash mob, these activists become part of a global network.

Both these events as well as other feminist actions and groups, were detailed in Kira Cochrane’s 2013 article “The Fourth Wave of Feminism: Meet the Rebel Women” and her book

All the Rebel Women (2013). Published in the British media outlet *The Guardian*, the article concentrates on UK on-line and direct-action campaigns that are in solidarity with feminists in the various parts of the world because these “new feminists [are] taking the struggle to the web—and the streets” (Cochrane). Walker’s article and the Riot Grrrl Manifesto have been considered the formal arrival of third wave feminism; this piece does the same for the fourth wave.

Cochrane declares, “Welcome to the fourth wave of feminism” and differentiates this wave by writing, “What's happening now feels like something new again. It's defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online” (Cochrane). Or in the words of Bates, founder of The Everyday Sexism Project, “it's very much about people saying: ‘Here is something that doesn't make sense to me, I thought women were equal, I'm going to do something about it’” (Cochrane). Both comments echo the DIY interventions of second wave feminists but, aided by technology, on a global scale.

The Eurocentric nature of Cochrane’s article cannot be denied. Therefore, this chapter seeks to explore the exchange between Pussy Riot and the creators of “Freepussyriot México” as a fourth wave feminist encounter that centers critical transnationalism through a transnational imaginary. In *Loca Motion: The Travels of Chicana and Latina Popular Culture*, Habell-Pallán deploys Angie Chabram-Deneresian’s concept of critical transnationalism to describe the shared yet distinct circumstances of feminists in the Americas, due to late-twentieth-century neoliberalism and globalization (Habell-Pallán, *Loca Motion* 2–3). Through the lens of critical transnationalism, Habell-Pallán acknowledges the transnational imaginary that binds those living in the Americas together, while noting the neoliberal tools such as the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that reinforce that imaginary while placing Latin American countries in unequal positions of power within it (3). Just as Riot Grrrl reclaimed the term “girl” and the

LGBTQ+ community reclaimed “queer,” Habell-Pallán reclaims transnationalism by utilizing critical transnationalism and the term translocal. Translocal affiliations and paths of cultural circulation transcend national borders and “imagine and desire cross cultural relations” (12). Scholar Lisa Lowe refers to these as “horizontal affiliations,” in which “marginalized groups recognize shared stakes in the struggle to create counterhegemonic practices and communities, in a national and international context” (Lowe, in Habell-Pallán, *Loca Motion* 12). Pussy Riot’s use of YouTube and the Internet facilitated a translocal connection with feminists across the globe, who in turn posted videos of #Freepussyriot rallies and art. I argue that the hope and world-making that occurs through translocality is what builds and sustains an activist feminist diaspora.

I define the videos I treat in this chapter as a form of documentary performance because much of the video documents their specific lived-experiences. Both Pussy Riot videos document their performance at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour for which they were later arrested and imprisoned. The #Freepussyriot México video documents the recording of an original song and scenes of these singers and musicians performing in a sacred location in Mexico City. These images echo images in the Pussy Riot videos. The final video I treat documents a speech given by a member of Pussy Riot to a Mexican audience. Through the methodology of thick description, I identify and analyze a shared transcultural visual language that allows these two groups to communicate regardless of different verbal languages and cultures.

As I mentioned in my introduction, I choose methodologies and theoretical frameworks that are most appropriate to the topic and case study in question. To that end, this chapter is an example of borderland performance studies as described by Chela Sandoval, Arturo J. Aldama, and Peter J. García in the introduction to their collection *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands* (Aldama et al. 1–28). The book, published the same year as Pussy Riot’s arrest,

recounts and investigates “de-colonizing performatics” or what the editors refer to as “perform antics” (6). Such performances are “deployed specifically to intervene in cruel social and psychic realities” (6). These are decolonizing acts, or “designed interventionist actions” that aim to generate “egalitarian exchanges” (6). Pussy Riot’s act of protest was certainly an attempt to intervene in the cruel social reality of Putin’s regime and indict the Orthodox Russian Church for their complicity. By recording and posting their protest online they began a translocal exchange with Mexican artists who share their ideals of justice and self-determination. Borderlands performance studies scholars refer to the shared visual cues and symbols that have meaning within this feminist activist network as “aesthetics of liberation, or part of a larger methodology of emancipation meant to transform the world” (7). All of the performatics or antics, whether they be Pussy Riot’s performance in the cathedral, Mexican artists recording a video in support of Pussy Riot, or a member of Pussy Riot speaking to a Mexican audience about freedom, are all “the antics of the oppressed” (7).

The *borderlands* in borderlands performance studies is not just the US/Mexico border, or borders between various Latin American countries, but also the border between “inner works” and “public acts” (25). These acts address psychic as well as social liberation and the connection between the two. One can *feel* liberated but can one act liberated or call for the liberation of others? When one acts in the name of liberation are those acts considered “outlaw” performances,” as was the case for Pussy Riot (8)?

At times liberation may require creating a “third space,” a borderland, a borderless land, or what Latina feminist and borderlands performance studies scholars call *Nepantla*. In the Indigenous language of Nahuatl, *Nepantla* means “living in between worlds” (16). I see the

Internet as the portal through which the feminist activist diaspora builds their liminal third space—their *Nepantla*.

Scholars have recognized these networks and described them in various ways. Gayatri Gopinath, whose scholarship resides at the intersection of transnational feminist, queer, diaspora, and postcolonial studies, employs the term queer diaspora to mark aesthetic practices that forge “South-to-South, region-to-region, and diaspora-region connectivities that critique, subordinate, and at times bypass the nation-state” (Gopinath 18). The visual exchange between Pussy Riot and these Mexican artists fits this description, with the Internet as the means by which their aesthetic practices bypass the nation-state. Maricela Fuentes utilizes the term “performance constellations” to describe the “entanglement between street protests and digital networking as co-creators of insurgent collective action” (Fuentes 2). Fuentes asserts that these performance constellations, or on-line and offline interactions of artists, activists, and protesters, “sustain collective action across spatial and temporal gaps” and “redefine the traditional repertoire of protest and activism in ways that are key to responding to contemporary systems of exploitation and subjection” (2). While both performance constellation and queer diaspora describe the kind of exchange I investigate in this case study, neither account for the documentary elements that make these performances fertile ground for translocal and transcultural connections. Such works are powerful because they are not just commentary but acts of resistance created from the words and lived experiences of women around the world. Pussy Riot’s videos are provocative because they document patriarchal control of female bodies with the ultimate goal of incarcerating those bodies. These documentary elements allow viewers to bear witness. Many feminists and borderlands performance studies scholars have noted the key role of “critical witnessing” or, in the words of Chela Sandoval, “witnessing and being witnessed,” to building these networks

(Aldama et al. 10). Juxtaposing documentary footage of the moments leading up to their arrest with scenes of Pussy Riot performing the song “Punk Prayer” turns lyrics such as “Virgin Mary, Mother of God, put Putin away” into cries for solidarity and support that these Mexican artists understood and answered (“Punk Prayer”, Freedom Requires Wings).

Such juxtaposition utilizes what Gopinath refers to as queer curation that is legible regardless of language barriers due to shared aesthetic practices of a queer diaspora (Gopinath 3–6). She defines queer curation as the act of “caring for” and “caring about,” aesthetic practices that work by placing seemingly unrelated objects or practices “in relation to one another” (4). Doing so reveals connections and why these connections matter. I argue that these shared aesthetics and practices are also a repertoire, as Diana Taylor would have it, that can be performed to communicate resistance and political solidarity across geopolitical boundaries. Female singers wearing a *balaclava*, or ski mask, while performing inside (Pussy Riot video) and outside (#Freepussyriot México video) a revered house of worship may seem incongruous to some, but can be perfectly legible images to women who share experiences of political, cultural, and religious oppression. Recognizing these commonalities and then acknowledging that recognition through a co-creation of art or performance (e.g., videos on the Internet or the CDI performance) is a form of *convivencia*. For example, in the #Freepussyriot México video, the Mexican singers wear traditional Mexican skirts with Zapatista-style ski masks. Both elements are well known and recognized symbols in Mexico. But, instead of wearing the traditional black Zapatista ski mask, they don brightly colored ski masks as a tribute to Pussy Riot. In terms of borderlands performance studies, these aesthetic practices, or in this case mix of practices, are “aesthetics of liberation.” Scholar Simone do Vale takes into account the online dissemination of such aesthetics by calling them “digital feminist narratives” (Vale 27). Mutual recognition online

and in person validates the systemic nature of shared female oppression and breeds solidarity. This is a twenty-first century form of consciousness raising, a tactic used by second wave feminists to highlight that indeed the personal is political. By sharing experience in consciousness raising groups and now on-line, women see the structural nature of injustice and domination and the need for a political rather than individual solution.

At times these shared narratives reveal a shared aesthetic language or “queer imaginary” which cannot be contained within a normative understanding of diaspora. In fact, the queering of the term diaspora contradicts our understanding of diaspora as the result of migration or forced dispersal of peoples from a common homeland. Therefore, the term queer diaspora, “a queer and feminist formulation of diaspora,” makes invisible networks that are otherwise “unintelligible within conventional mappings of diaspora and nation, as well as within dominant Euro-American articulations of queerness” (Gopinath 6). The imagery and messaging in the Pussy Riot videos filmed in Russia and the #Freepussyriot México video filmed in Mexico are based in the documentation of shared lived experiences and make visible a feminist activist diaspora. Unlike a traditional notion of diaspora, these women do not share a geographic homeland, but they do share a political philosophy of gender equality for all women. Making these bonds legible through potent documentary material is a utopian act, because doing so, even through cyberspace, momentarily brings into being a world without borders. Using the term diaspora in this way is a decolonizing act because it transcends the colonial history of slavery and displacement responsible for geographic diasporas.

While I will be using the term transnational feminism as an umbrella term for feminist activism around the world, it is important to distinguish between transnational feminism and Third World feminism. These are key concepts circulating among feminist activists who seek to

build networks beyond their national borders and those who subscribe to either branch could be part of the kind of network I am describing. Transnational and Third World feminism reject the second-wave white feminist analysis of gender as the primary cause of oppression, by recognizing the role of colonialism in establishing and perpetuating repressive systems. In this way, both types of feminism are de-colonializing frameworks appropriate for use in borderlands performance studies. Feminist scholar Ranjoo Seodu Herr explains that transnational feminism recognizes that “women’s multiple and complex oppressions in their various national contexts . . . are compounded not only by race and class but also by imperialism and colonialism” (Herr 3). Therefore, this branch of feminism militates against global capitalism and neoliberalism as “gendered” paradigms that require the exploitation of poor third-world women for their survival (12). Transnational feminism rejects the nation-state and nationalism as detrimental to feminism and works to build networks that transcend the nation-state. Scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty have noted that the plight of Third World women is not just a “a worse case of gender oppression” and therefore requires “a feminist analysis by Third World feminists themselves of Third World women’s diverse forms of oppression and different modes of resistance on the ground” (3). Third World feminists are not necessarily antithetical to the nation-state and recognize the value of ethnic identity, nationalist resistance movements, and local activism (9). Ultimately, I am less interested in the differences between Pussy Riot’s ideology and those of Mexican feminists and care more about the liberatory aesthetics they share that make their decolonizing work legible to each other. For these reasons I will use the terms transnational, translocal, and diaspora to describe their connection.

Latina feminist theology is a form of transnational feminism, as it marries the resistance to neoliberalism with the recognition of the spirituality shared by Latin American women

through organized religion, Indigenous spiritual practices, and the “cultural” Catholicism of non-religious Latinas. The result is a shared utopic and theological vision of a “civilization that is free of systemic injustice and violence” caused by patriarchy and its network of multiple and intersecting structures of domination (Pilar Aquino et al. xiv). Analyzing these videos through a Latina feminist lens reveals a Mexican feminist affinity with Pussy Riot.

In the article “Machismo and Marianismo,” Evelyn P. Stevens attributes the conception of the ideal Latina as sexually pure, passive, and valued primarily for reproductive fertility, to the Latin American idolatry of the Virgin Mary known as marianismo. In fact, Stevens frames machismo as the counterpart to marianismo (Stevens 58). The scene of men forcibly removing the female band members from the church illustrates the Russian machismo flagrantly cultivated and practiced by Putin.

Latina feminists have reclaimed the Virgin Mary as the ultimate feminist icon, thereby freeing her from the binary of traditional marianismo. For Catholics and specifically Latina Feminists, the Virgin Mary is akin to a goddess, as she is the only human, besides Jesus, who is without sin (Pilar Aquino et al. 210–11). When members of Pussy Riot sing “Virgin Mary, Mother of God, put Putin away!” “Virgin Mary, Mother of God, become a feminist,” and “Mary, Mother of God, is with us in protest!” even religious Latina Feminists can reconcile Pussy Riot’s actions not as blasphemous acts but as spiritual activism (Rumens).

Lastly, I conclude the chapter by discussing a video of Pussy Riot member Maria Alyokhina's speech at CDI conference in Mexico in 2015 (CDI 2015, The Glam Belle). For this piece I use a mixed method of thick description and materialist semiotics as detailed in *Reading the Material Theatre* by Ric Knowles. While the Pussy Riot videos and #Freepussyriot México were conceived as such, the recording of Alyokhina's speech was a live event and materialist

semiotics was designed to analyze live performances. While in prison, the feminist activist network I describe only existed in cyberspace. But once released from prison, Pussy Riot members could physically engage with these virtual connections, which the CDI performance chronicles. This live performance actualized the online exchanges I document in the two Pussy Riot videos and in #Freepussy Riot México. By recording and posting their acts of resistance on the Internet, a fourth wave feminist and decolonizing act I am categorizing as a feminist documentary performance, Pussy Riot unknowingly tapped into an unseen feminist activist diaspora. This case study demonstrates the power of documentary performance to forge transnational and transcultural coalitions, thereby enacting a global version of *convivencia*.

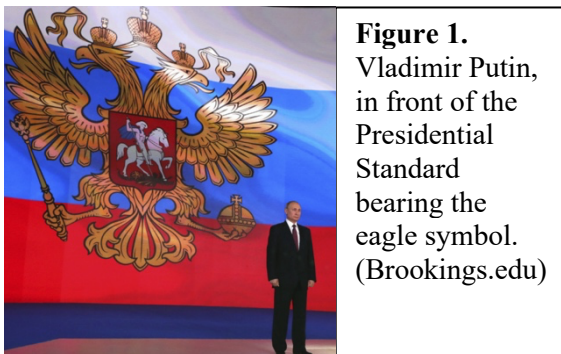
Pussy Riot

On 21 February 2012, less than a week before the Russian presidential election in which Vladimir Putin would seek and win his third term, Pussy Riot members entered the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow's largest Russian Orthodox cathedral. The group then commandeered the dais to perform their anti-Putin song "Punk Prayer" (Sputnik). Their protest was motivated by Putin's twelve years of authoritarian rule, first as President (2000-2008) and then Prime Minister (2008-2012). He persists in that position to the present, twenty-one years; in fact, on April 5, 2021 Putin signed a constitutional amendment allowing him to potentially remain in office until 2036 ("Putin—Already Russia's Longest Leader since Stalin"). Pussy Riot's critiques of Putin include his repression and incarceration of political opponents, such as Russian lawyer Alexei Navalny, who as of this writing is suffering from a lack of medical care while in a Russian prison (BBC, "Navalny"). Putin has also sanctioned police violence at

political rallies and enacted anti-LGBTQ+ legislation (“Pussy Riot’s Activists Talk Protests, Poisonings and Putin”). The lyrics to Punk Prayer describe these claims:

KGB have turned to saints
 Gay parades sent off in chains
 Blessed limousines congest the streets
 To hail their saint-in-chief
 Holy Mary, drive Putin away
 Drive away this darkness from your halls
 Drive away the ungodly souls
 Our Lady tear the eagle off your walls

Not only do the lyrics describe arrests of gay rights activists at demonstrations, but they also point to Putin as the driving force in these detentions. They implore the Virgin Mary (e.g., “Holy Mary,” “Our Lady”) to drive away Putin who is a false “god” (e.g., “saint-in-chief” “ungodly souls”) and “tear the eagle off your walls.” The eagle refers to the symbol which has appeared on earlier iterations of the Russian flag and is now on the presidential standard. The theme removing state control from religion and the Orthodox Russian church’s complicity in the Putin regime appears throughout “Punk Prayer.” An eagle also appears on the Mexican flag and is a symbol of the state.



Public Reaction

While Russian approval of Pussy Riot's two-year prison sentence for "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred" was mixed, worldwide condemnation of the Russian government was strong and decisive (BBC, "Pussy Riot Members Jailed for Two Years for Hooliganism"). During their two-month trial, the three Pussy Riot members Maria Alyokhina, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, and Yekaterina Samutsevich became an international cause célèbre.

"Free Pussy Riot" quickly became a rallying cry around the world, as feminists showed their resistance to Putin in particular and to oppression and patriarchy in general. *The New York Times* characterized Pussy Riot's sentence as a politically-motivated censure of free speech: "in a country where public dissent is at a neophyte stage, Pussy Riot's 'Punk Prayer,' a 40-second lip sync, only served to highlight the discordantly severe punishment its members received" (Ryzik). Celebrities such as Madonna and Yoko Ono demonstrated public support (Ryzik). Amnesty International named the women "prisoners of conscience" (Silverman). Upon their conviction, *Free Pussy Riot* demonstrations around the world increased in frequency and intensity. Many of these took place in Latin America and spoke to transnational feminists who read Pussy Riot's act not just as a statement against Putin, but also as a resistance to authoritarian rule and the suppression of freedom and civic discourse. Ultimately the international pressure, coming right before the Olympic Games hosted in Sochi, Russia, worked. With only two months remaining on their sentences, the Russian government released Alyokhina and Tolokonnikova (Nocera). Samutsevich, the third Pussy Riot member on trial, was also charged but given a suspended sentence and paroled. (Nocera).

Videos

What follows is a thick description of the 1:44 minute cathedral video. Both the cathedral video and the official “Punk Prayer” music video have circulated widely on the Internet with the music video version reproduced to include subtitles in various languages including English and Spanish. Producing, translating, and disseminating the videos is evidence of the unseen labor of this feminist activist diaspora. In addition to the labor of this network, I illuminate aesthetic practices of queer curation in the cathedral video that will be repeated in the “Punk Prayer” music video, #FreePussyRiot México video, and the recording of Alyokhina’s speech in Mexico. I consider what images these Mexican artists saw in the Pussy Riot videos that moved them to act in solidarity by creating the #FreePussyRiot México video and posting it on YouTube. For example, I know they were familiar with the “Punk Prayer” music video, as they included a short section of it at the end of their video along with a Mexican news broadcast reporting Pussy Riot’s arrest. By identifying images and symbols that Pussy Riot used in their videos and how Mexican feminists could have read them, I can point to the images in the #FreePussyRiot México video that emulate or speak to these images in their own cultural vernacular. “Speaking” across cyberspace through these videos then becomes an act of *convivencia*.

I am analyzing the two videos produced from the Pussy Riot performance of “Punk Prayer” through a borderlands performance studies lens, to highlight visuals and icons that were a call to action for Mexican feminists. Scenes of confined female bodies coupled with their own articulate political statements resonated particularly well in Mexico, the birthplace of celebrated transnational feminist foremother Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Putin’s framing of Pussy Riot as enemies of religion for vilifying him and appealing to the Virgin Mary made them appealing to non-religious feminists who still consider the Virgin Mary a feminist icon. By arresting and

incarcerating them, Putin raised Pussy Riot to the level of martyrs or political prisoners, thereby tapping into a well-known and easily recognizable Mexican trope. That in turn facilitated a powerful and borderless coalition. Therefore, the translocal legibility of Pussy Riot's message offers an instructive example of the proliferation of feminist documentary performance that can build and reinforce coalitions.

Cathedral Video: Thick Description

The quality of the cathedral video is that of a home movie during a chaotic and unexpected moment, which echoes the DIY aesthetic of Riot Grrrl punk rock. It is obviously a handheld video camera that shakes as it is moved and as the person filming is pushed. The cathedral has high ceilings and opulent décor. Similar décor can be seen in the #Pussyriot México video which is partially filmed at Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, one of the most sacred sites in Mexico and the Catholic world.

The action takes place in the nave, or main body of the church, where people stand during the services. This area consists of a dais, or raised platform, almost the width of the entire cathedral, where I am assuming the officiant would speak. In the center of the dais is a short set of stairs and in front of that is an arched wreath of white flowers. The wreath surrounds a painted portrait in a gold frame that sits on a white stand. On the wall behind the dais are three panels. The panels on the left and right side are white architectural features which include large white columns on either side of an arch, which is also painted white. The columns and arch frame a large wall painting of Mary and Christ Child on the left panel, and Jesus on the right, both painted in a renaissance style. The center panel directly behind the raised platform is gilded and

has a square grid pattern. Many of the squares are inset with paintings in a style similar to the large paintings framed by the white arches.

Five members of Pussy Riot are already on the altar when the video begins. They take off their black coats to reveal their colorful outfits. Each is wearing a *balaclava*, or ski mask, in either yellow, purple, red, orange, or blue. One wears a white dress with red tights/leggings. Two others wear pink dresses; one with green tights/leggings and one with blue tights/leggings. The fourth member is wearing a green dress with brown tights/leggings. The fifth wears a red dress with blue tights/leggings. All the dresses are sleeveless and knee-length and appear to be made of a stretch fabric that can be easily pulled over their heads.

In a 2012 interview with *The Guardian*, three members of Pussy Riot who were in hiding from the Russian government while their fellow members were on trial, appeared on camera in their colorful clothing and *balaclavas*. Using the pseudonyms *Sparrow*, *Squirrel*, and *Balaklava* they explained the significance of their clothing by stating that one of the main ideas of the group is “to be anonymous,” and “that’s why we wear the masks.” When asked, “Why the bright colors?” *Squirrel* replied, “Because we’re bright!” She goes on to state, “When I put on my mask, I feel like a person who can do everything . . . it’s another part of me that has strong feelings that what she’s doing is right and she has enough power to change something.” *Sparrow* adds, “It’s like being Spider Man or Cat Woman” (The Guardian, Ефросиния Михалова).



Figure 3. Pussy Riot performing Punk Prayer in Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow. 21 February 2012. Photo by Philip Cosores.

While the *balaclavas* provide anonymity from authorities during unsanctioned public acts, wearing similar clothing also cultivates a feeling of unity. The outfits ignite a sense of power as the performers join with like-minded compatriots to accomplish what could not be done alone. But even within unity and anonymity, the choice of bright colors brings attention to the group, and their purpose while adding a note of joy that may inspire others who feel powerless alone. In her remarks at CDI in 2015 Maria Alyokhina quotes Voltaire by stating, “[I]f something is funny, it cannot be dangerous anymore” (CDI). Her comments reinforce Pussy Riot’s strategy of utilizing humor, and the carnivalesque in their decolonizing ‘perform antics’.

Armed with their multi-colored outfits, the members of Pussy Riot use the altar as a stage by bringing their instruments and microphones with mic stands up to this platform. These items are already on the platform when the video begins. A guard in a black uniform comes on to the stage by walking up the center stairs. He initially attempts to grab the member in the green dress and yellow *balaclava*. She is jumping around and is able to escape his grasp, but he successfully takes a black object with a handle from her. The object looks like a black box, and may be a light source or an amplifier. Before leaving the stage, the same guard grabs the member wearing a white dress with a red stripe down the center and a red *balaclava*, as she attempts to put on her electric guitar and plug it in. The guard successfully pulls this member and her guitar off the platform. Two other men dressed in black, possibly guards, then physically restrain her so she cannot reenter the stage.

While this is happening, the other members of Pussy Riot jump up and down and sing without amplification so it is hard to hear them. They punch the air with their fists and then lean forward to punch toward the ground. They also kick the air. At times the members are punching toward the ground in sync with each other. They repeat this choreography several times. As this

is going on, an older woman wearing a white kerchief on her head and a long-sleeved green dress pushes people away from the scene, including the person filming. At one point she is directly facing the camera.

Even though the camera person is pushed away from the dais, they remain in the church and zoom in on the members of Pussy Riot still on stage. At least three other people stand in front of the dais taking pictures of the Pussy Riot performance. The camera person seems to be behind some kind of barrier and does not get as close to the action as those taking pictures. At this point there are four members of Pussy Riot on stage. A young man, who may be another guard, comes on stage wearing black pants and a black sweater vest over a blue long-sleeved shirt. He attempts to grab the Pussy Riot member in the red dress, but she evades his grasp. Two other men enter the stage. One may be a guard, as he is wearing similar black clothing as the younger man. The other is wearing a dark gray puffer coat and may be a guard or a visitor to the cathedral. Running to evade the men and eventually dropping to their knees, the members of Pussy Riot bow down several times, placing their heads, hands, and arms on the ground as they do. The member in the green dress and yellow *balaclava* crosses herself as she repeatedly bows on her knees. At this point the Pussy Riot members grab their coats. To leave the cathedral, they must bob and weave to avoid or break free from the grasp of the men who have been trying to detain them. As they head out into the street, they put their fists in the air and continue to yell something that sounds like “Holy shit, shit, Lord’s shit!”

Several weeks later, Maria Alyokhina, Yekaterina Samutsevich, and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova would be arrested and charged with "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred" (“Pussy Riot”). They would be held without bail for five months, until their trial in July 2012, when they were convicted and sentenced to two years in prison. Samutsevich was freed on

probation in October 2012, but Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina remained in jail. In December 2014, Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina were released from prison, just three months shy of serving their two-year sentences and two months before the 2014 Winter Olympic games in Sochi, Russia. Some, including Alyokhina, categorized the early release as a public relations stunt prior to the Olympics, when the Russian government would face international attention and potential scrutiny. During their incarceration, Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina, both mothers of young children, were denied parole several times. Tolokonnikova complained of abuses by prison staff and at one point went on hunger strike (BBC, “Pussy Riot: The Story so far”).

“Punk Prayer” Music Video

During the two-minute music video, Pussy Riot performs the entirety of the song “Punk Prayer.” They appeal directly to the Virgin Mary in song and bypass the manmade bureaucracy of organized religion. In fact, each time they sing the phrase “Virgin Mary, Mother of God, put Putin away! Put Putin away, Put Putin away,” they do so in a traditional choral style, performing melodic soprano vocals reminiscent of a hymn. This portion of the song is accompanied only by the piano and then is juxtaposed with the frenetic punk-style electric guitar and drums in the next stanza. Crafting “Punk Prayer” in contrasting styles allows Pussy Riot to *pray* to the Virgin Mary in a respectful, beautiful, and even conventionally feminine manner while embodying an aggressive tone of voice and music for lyrics that name the sins of mortal men like Putin and Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church (Tayler). I also consider this juxtaposition an example of queer curation. Lyrical and angelic female voices contrasted with sections of raucous electric guitar creates a metaphor for the quiet and regal cathedral which physically sits in Moscow, the center of Putin’s violent and despotic rule. In

fact, Pussy Riot's noisy performance in the quiet cathedral also calls attention to the Church's silence and hypocrisy regarding Putin's injustices against the Russian populace.

The brightly colored *balaclavas* worn by Pussy Riot simultaneously hide their identity while also calling attention to their acts. The homemade *balaclavas* can be understood as an aesthetic practice of members of a feminist activist diaspora. Vale argues that the masks symbolize "power in togetherness" and "de-individualization." The colorful, sometimes neon hues of the masks give their performances a "playful" and "carnavalesque" valence. In fact, their performance in Christ the Saviour took place on the final day of Brazilian carnival, possibly a strategic move by Pussy Riot.

Through their *balaclavas*, Pussy Riot, knowingly or unknowingly, semiotically taps into a symbol of social justice and resistance legible in Mexico. Originally worn by soldiers in the Crimean War (1853–1856), the *balaclava* can also be read by Mexicans as the mask of the Zapatista freedom fighters, known as *pasamontañas* (ski masks), *pañuelos* (handkerchiefs/bandana), or *paliacates* (scarves), who in 1994 began a guerrilla uprising against the Mexican government in defense of marginalized indigenous communities in Chiapas, Mexico (Gonzalez 45). At no time do Zapatistas allow the public to see their faces. In fact, when rumors circulated about the identity of Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos, the charismatic Zapatista spokesperson who engaged with the media, the Zapatista response was,

Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristóbal, a gang member in Neza, a rocker in the National University, a Jew in Germany, an ombudsman in the Defense Ministry, a communist in the post–Cold War era . . . a Zapatista in the mountains of southeast

Mexico. So Marcos is a human being, any human being, in this world. Marcos is all the exploited, marginalized, and oppressed minorities, resisting and saying, “Enough!” (Eichert, Rowley, and Sandberg, in Gonzalez 46-47)

Subcomandante Marcos is able to project the image of the ubiquitous freedom fighter because his identity is not known. Just as the *balaklava* provides a sense of unity for members of Pussy Riot, the Zapatista *pasamontañas* does the same, and expands this unity to include marginalized peoples around the world. Furthermore, Zapatistas reinforced their identity as a unified entity or in the words of Marth Gonzalez, “by refusing to let the media take control of their collective resistance and single out ‘the one’ charismatic leader. Instead, they boldly declared, “¡Todos somos Marcos!” (We are all Marcos!) (47).

The Zapatistas’ poetic response to inquiries about Subcomandante Marcos’ identity is the kind of language the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional/Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) are known for. They often communicate their political aims through *dichos*, or sayings like “¡No tenemos que pedir permiso para ser libres!” (We don’t have to ask permission to be free!) and “¡Detrás de nosotros estamos ustedes!” (Behind us, we are you!) (46). These *dichos* express their defiance through the lens of their Indigenous values.

Among these values are relationships. Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson writes “The concepts or ideas are not as important as the relationships that went into forming them. Again, an Indigenous epistemology has systems of knowledge built upon relationships between things, rather than on the things themselves” (Wilson, in Gonzalez 44). This sentiment is the cornerstone of Zapatista philosophy, often referred to as Zapatismo. To that end, EZLN leadership is structured through a system of local *comandantes*, who organize their communities. Through the

local *comandancia* the uprising could emerge as a collective decision among hundreds of communities (Gonzalez 48–49).

The focus on relationships and building a new world rather than taking power has shaped the Zapatistas tactics, like fourth wave feminists they have embraced technology and the internet to build relationships with other marginalized groups and communicate *Zapatismo*. Gonzalez considers them “the first post-modern revolution that was *not* seeking government power” (46). Zapatistas have sought engagement and dialogue with other marginalized peoples through *encuentros*, or meetings that function as “self-reflexive exercises that engendered community building and incited critical consciousness” (46). In fact, in 1996, Gonzalez and a group of one-hundred and twenty *artistas* organized and attended a multi-day *Encuentro Cultural Chicano/Indígena por la Humanidad y contra el Neoliberalismo*, in the Zapatista community of Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico (54). The *encuentro* was a manifestation of *convivencia*.

One of the key themes of the meeting was women’s health and their role in activism. Prior to the Zapatista movement becoming public, women in the Zapatista community demanded Women’s Revolutionary Laws, which stated their “right to choose marriage partners, to determine how many children to have or not have, and to join the army if they so wished” (49). The implementation of these laws and the visibility of female leaders such as Comandante Ramona, represent another dimension of the Zapatista fight for Indigenous autonomy and self-determination. While Zapatista women still struggle for equality within their own communities, they have forged local, national and transnational female networks. For example, scholar Roberto Gonzalez Flores has studied informal transnational learning networks between the Zapatistas and Chicanas (49). These networks exemplify the kind of activist feminist diaspora I am theorizing.



Figure 4. Indigenous and mestiza women in the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in the mountains of Chiapas, Mexico. 17 Nov 1983. Posted on Twitter @wrkclasshistory. Photographer unknown.

Pussy Riot expresses their Zapatismo when they choose to wear *balaklavas*. Like the Zapatistas, they have expressed a desire to place their work in solidarity with other oppressed groups. Some Pussy Riot supporters, myself included, were introduced to them prior to seeing either the “Punk Prayer” music video or the cathedral video. I first learned about Pussy Riot through their interviews and articles quoting their articulate statements. Encountered in this way, the reception of the video is shaped by the words the performers use to self-define their work and intentions. The same can be said for their statements in court. As *The New York Times* notes, “Pussy Riot’s unapologetic court statements revealed an intellectual and philosophical rigor” (Ryzik). In her closing statement in court, Maria Alyokhina connects Pussy Riot’s plight to that of free thinkers throughout history.

. . .nobody can take away my inner freedom. It lives in the word, it will go on living thanks to openness [*glasnost*], when this will be read and heard by thousands of people. This freedom goes on living with every person who is not indifferent, who hears us in this country. With everyone who found shards of the trial in themselves, like in previous times they found them in Franz Kafka and Guy Debord . . . I thirst for the truth; and these

things will make all of us just a little bit more free. (“Pussy Riot Closing Statements”)

This statement positions their performance as more than “hooliganism,” but an expression of freedom and dissent in a society that does not value either, particularly from women.

In both videos the most prominent image is that of petite female bodies restrained and controlled by patriarchal brute force, while older women look on helplessly. The older woman wearing a green dress and a white headscarf, perhaps working at the cathedral, actively attempts to block the camera and assist the men who are restraining the band members. Three women in hats and heavy fur coats, possibly tourists visiting the cathedral, observe in shock. By doing nothing, the witnesses could not help but be complicit in the task of restraining and silencing these female bodies. Sympathetic bystanders of all genders were likely unwilling and/or unable to intervene as doing so could endanger their safety and possibly lead to their arrest. The scenario of the female body and female expression impeded by patriarchy and by women entrenched in patriarchal power structures is familiar to Mexican feminists. As young women, Mexican feminists often find themselves constrained both by the dictates of patriarchy and by women who enforce, actively or passively, the strict religious and cultural gender norms of submission, propriety, duty, silence, and unquestioned fealty.

#FreePussyRiot México Video

During Pussy Riot’s incarceration, Mexicans organized “Free Pussy Riot” demonstrations across the nation. A particularly meaningful act of solidarity came from three Mexican singers, Lucía Escobar Torres, Olinka Gil Amezcua, and Karina Figueroa Lima, who posted a music video titled #FreePussyRiot México (“#Freepussyriot México”). In the video, the women

perform an original song addressed to the Virgin Mary. What follows is my thick description of the video. The lyrics I reference were all sung in Spanish; I am using an English translation of the lyrics for my analysis.

The first image in the video is the golden rooftop of the *Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, built at the foot of the hill of Tepeyac to commemorate the Virgin Mary's apparitions to an Indigenous man. In Mexico the Virgin Mary is often known as *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, or *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (Our Lady of Guadalupe), therefore the *Basílica* is specifically dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Just as *Cathedral of Christ the Saviour*, in the *Pussy Riot* video, is the largest cathedral in the Russian capital city of Moscow, the *basílica* is an acclaimed site in Mexico's capital city. Both buildings share golden domed rooftops.

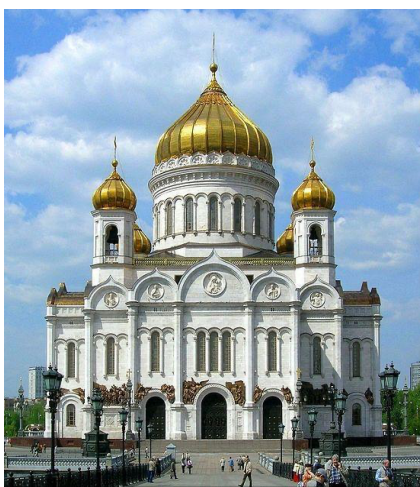


Figure 5. Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow. Orthodoxchristian.com.com
Photographer unknown



Figure 6. *Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, Mexico City. Screenshot from #Freepussyriot México

This initial image demonstrates the magnitude of power held by the religious institutions both sets of women are engaging. The image is the first to demonstrate a connection between the three women in Mexico and the three incarcerated women in Russia. One key difference here is

that the basilica in Mexico is specifically dedicated to the Virgin Mary, not Christ. In the lyrics of “Punk Prayer,” Pussy Riot asks “Virgin Mary, Mother of God, become a feminist, we pray thee, become a feminist, we pray thee.” Latina feminists already consider the Virgin Mary a feminist. The singers are showing their Russian counterparts that in Mexico, feminists have already done the decolonizing work of claiming the Virgin Mary as their own. For Mexican feminists, the Virgin Mary transcends the man-made physical and political institution of the Church. Thus, it is only appropriate that the Mexican singers turn to the Virgin to request protection for fellow women in this feminist activist diaspora.

Basilica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe) is of particular significance because it is not only a Mexican national shrine, but also one the most important pilgrimage sites in the Catholic world (Herrera-Sobek 1129). Originally an ancient Roman term describing any number of “large roofed public buildings” such as courthouses, markets and meeting halls, the title “basilica” now marks a church’s antiquity or distinguished status as an international site of worship (“Basilica Architecture”). This basilica specifically honors the Virgin Mary by housing the cloak of Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin, an Indigenous Chichimec, and the only Catholic Saint indigenous to the Americas (Cox 84). According to the myth, the Virgin Mary appeared before Juan Diego several times on the hill of Tepeyac. She told him to build a temple in her honor on that site, and declared “I am the compassionate mother of you and of all your people here in this land . . .” (Poole 28). She then asked him to gather flowers on the hill of Tepeyac. He did so, and found flowers unseasonably in bloom and collected them in his *tilma* (in Classical Nahuatl *tilmahtli*), or cloak (29). As proof of the apparition, he brought the flowers to the Bishop Juan de Zumárraga, the first archbishop of Mexico. When Juan Diego opened his *tilma* in front of the Bishop, an image of the Virgin Mary

with brown skin and Indigenous features was imprinted on the fabric. Thereafter, people came to see the image of “the Brown Virgin, *La Virgencita Morena*” (Herrera-Sobek 1132). In 1747 La Virgen de Guadalupe was proclaimed the patroness of New Spain (Mexico), and in 1910 Pope Pius X proclaimed her the patroness of all Latin America, which Pius XI expanded to include the Philippines in 1935. Pope Pius XII proclaimed her “Queen of Mexico and Empress of the Americas” in 1945 (Taylor 47).

The importance of the Virgin Mary continues as the video then shows a female singer in the sound booth of a recording studio. She begins the song by speaking, not singing, the following in Spanish: “Maria is your name, Guadalupe your destiny. Three young women defending the female gender, had their paths cut short because they dared to speak freely.” These lines are spoken over the music and identify the three members of Pussy Riot as “defending the female gender” and “daring to speak freely.” The singer addresses the Virgin Mary by using the name “Maria” and “Guadalupe.” It is interesting to note that “Maria” is also the first name of one of the incarcerated members of Pussy Riot. As mentioned earlier, upon her release Maria Alyokhina would come to Mexico to speak at *La Ciudad de las Ideas*.

The viewer then sees another one of the singers on the plaza outside the basilica wearing a bright blue Zapatista mask. Zapatista masks are typically black and have just one large opening for the eyes, which distinguishes it from the Pussy Riot style *balaclava* which is usually in a bright color and has one opening for each eye and one for the mouth. I argue that this image is the first syncretic nod to Pussy Riot, and documents the struggle they share.



Figure 7. Mexican singer in a blue Zapatista mask. Behind her are the musician accompanying her. They wear traditional white guayabera shirts. Screenshot from #Freepussyriot México

The viewer then sees a crowd of people entering the basilica carrying a statue of the Virgin Mary. This cuts to scenes of the three singers singing outside the basilica, unmasked. They sing the following lyrics:

You are the Virgin in Heaven, you are the Virgin on Earth

You are the Virgin in Heaven, and you are the Virgin on Earth

Protect those who with their song, fight against war

Protect those who with their song, fight against war

(#Freepussyriot México)

Throughout the song, lines are repeated twice and sung in a call and response fashion. This is a communal type of singing, not choral, because the women do not sing together. Similar to Pussy Riot, there is no distinction between the “lead singer” and “backup singers.” For example, one vocalist will sing “You are the Virgin in Heaven, you are the Virgin on Earth.” Then another signer responds with “You are the Virgin in Heaven, **and** you are the Virgin on Earth.” The word “and” is added to the second sentence for emphasis. Every time there is a repeating couplet one

singer performs the first line and another responds by either repeating that line exactly or adding a small change.

While they sing, we see the blurred image of the Mexican flag behind them. The image of the flag coupled with the word “war” is likely a reference to the Mexican practice of carrying a flag with an image of the Virgin into battle for protection (Herrera-Sobek 1132). The song explicitly names this practice later with the lyrics, “You have been the banner in so many revolutions. In so many revolutions, you have been the banner.” The banner of Virgen de Guadalupe was carried into battle during Mexico’s war of independence from Spain (1810-1821) and during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). Emiliano Zapata’s army carried a banner of the Virgin while fighting for Indigenous land rights and against Porfirio Diaz’s 35-year dictatorship. Legend has it that Zapata ordered his soldiers to print an image of the Virgin in their hats for protection (1132). Similarly, in the next stanza the singers ask “Guadalupana,” their “sweet dear Mother” to “Protect these three women from all injustice.” So, from the singers’ point of view, Pussy Riot is fighting their own war for independence and justice.

The camera returns the viewer to the sound booth where the three singers perform unmasked and in contemporary street clothing. The viewer is then taken back to the basilica where they see the portrait of the Virgin Mary hanging on the gilded basilica wall, which echoes the image of the gilded wall in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the backdrop of Pussy Riot’s “Punk Prayer” performance.

Next, a series of images intercut between the singers and the musicians performing in the studio and the singers and the musicians performing on the plaza outside the basilica. When the three female singers are on the plaza, they are wearing what appears to be more traditional blouses and skirts which contrast with the modern street clothes they wear in the studio. Possibly

the traditional dress is a sign of respect for the Virgin as they stand in front of her temple or perhaps it is a reference to the female Zapatista freedom fighters who wear traditional indigenous-style blouses and skirts with their Zapatista masks. This segment ends with a wider shot of the gilded wall and the framed image of the Virgin. The women then sing:

Listen to our song, and hear Morena your wounded people

Listen to our song, and hear Morena your wounded people

You are a mother and you are a Virgin, you are merciful

You are a mother and you are a Virgin, you are merciful

(#Free pussyriot México)

Here they refer to the Virgin as “Morena,” a Spanish term used for someone who is brunette or has brown skin. This phrase conjures the image of the “Brown Virgin” with Indigenous features that appeared on Juan Diego’s *tilma*, now housed in the basilica. Calling her Morena reminds us that she is the “Empress of the Americas” who proclaimed to Juan Diego that she would be a compassionate mother to all the people of this land. As protector of the Indigenous Americans, she defends those most “wounded” by patriarchy, colonialism, and authoritarianism.

A fast-paced instrumental section follows and is accompanied by various images of the singers and musicians in the studio and on the plaza. The musicians play the traditional instruments associated with the *son jarocho* style of Mexican folk music, such as the eight-string guitar-shaped *jarana*. Another musician plays the *marimba*, a wooden box with metal strips attached that resonate when they are plucked (“Son Jarocho, The Sound of Veracruz”). While the singers are all women, the musicians are all men, which shows the viewer that both Mexican male and female artists are responsible for this tribute to Pussy Riot. Just as the women wear

more traditional dress when they perform on the plaza, the men also wear traditional Mexican guayabera shirts when performing outside of the recording studio.

The singers are then filmed inside of the basilica, not singing but viewing the image of the Virgin and standing next to candles lit in her honor. Still wearing their traditional skirts and blouses, they now each wear a different brightly-colored bandana over their nose and mouth. This imagery also alludes to EZLN, (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional/ The Zapatista Army of National Liberation), but in a more colorful or Pussy Riot-esque form. The Zapatista bandanas are usually red or black mimicking the red star against the solid black ground on the EZLN flag. Concealing one's identity with a bandana points to the celebrated Mexican image of the revolutionary who is considered a "bandit" or "outlaw"—terms which could be used to describe members of Pussy Riot.



Figure 8. Singers wearing brightly colored bandanas. Screenshot form #FreepussyRiot Mexico
Screen shot from #Freepussyriot México



Figure 9. Members of the EZLN (Zapatista Army) in traditional red and black face coverings, the colors of the EZLN flag. Photo originally publish in *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*. Photographer unknown.

The camera then zooms in on the cross on top of the new basilica, which was built next to the old one when the original edifice was being repaired after a bombing in 1921 (Kraft). This section begins with these lyrics:

Do not abandon the Russian women for wanting to be butterflies

Do not abandon the Russian women for wanting to be butterflies

Give them wings, so they can escape

Give them wings, so they can escape

(#Free pussyriot México)

These are the first and only lyrics that reference Russia and possibly Pussy Riot's incarceration. The imagery of butterflies brings to mind the desire to burst out of a confinement and fly free. This reference to confinement could imply the authoritarian rule of Putin, his control of dissent, and the state-run media that requires Pussy Riot not only to break the law in protest, but also to use a more democratic space, like the Internet, to share their message.

Another instrumental section begins. One of the singers on the plaza is performing a tapping type of dance, possibly El Jarbe Tapatío, the national dance of Mexico. Returning to the studio, the camera zooms in on one singer's purple t-shirt displaying the words "Mujeres Resistiendo" (Women Resisting) in white lettering. The singers perform the following lines:

Sweet Guadalupana, sacred Mother

Sweet Guadalupana, sacred Mother, sacred Mother

Listen to our song, and listen Morena to your beloved land

Listen to our song, listen Morena to your beloved land

You have been The Banner in so many revolutions

In so many revolutions, you have been The Banner

Now dear Mother listen to our prayers

Listen to our prayers, dear Mother

(#Free pussyriot México)

The phrase “listen Morena to your beloved land” evokes the notion of the Virgin as an Indigenous woman who is the patron Saint of Mexico and Empress of the Americas. But Pussy Riot is not in the Americas. Here indeed the singers are bringing the feminist activist diaspora into being. Morena’s “beloved land” is the earth and her protection can be requested of anyone who suffers. Since Latina feminists claim her as a feminist icon, then perhaps she is the patron saint of all feminists as well. Using the term “prayer” in the final two lines of the stanza reminds the viewer of “Punk Prayer” and that the Mexican women are praying to the Virgin on behalf of Pussy Riot. By also praying to the Virgin, Pussy Riot was trying to do what Latina feminists have already done—separate her from the corrupt church. These lines are accompanied by images of the singers and musicians on the plaza and in the studio.

The lyrics resume with:

The PRI to never come back is what our hearts want

Our hearts do not want the PRI to ever come back

Guadalupana sweet dear Mother, dear Mother

Dear Mother

Listen to our song, and listen Morena to your wounded people

Listen Morena to your wounded people, hear us!

Mother! Dear Mother!

(#Free pussyriot México)

PRI is the acronym for Partido de la Revolución Democrática. Formed in 1929, this Mexican political party held uninterrupted power for 71 years, with the majority of presidents, senators, and governors coming from the party. The PRI did not lose a governor's race until 1989. Known for exerting authoritarian control through corporatism, political patronage, and the violent repression of dissent, the PRI's power has been weakened in recent years due to corruption and scandals (Graham). Again, this portion of the song is not about Pussy Riot, but speaks to a shared experience of national suffering. They understand Pussy Riot's grievances and know that their own country could also slide back into tyranny without resistance and faith.

The song ends with various scenes of the musicians and singers on the plaza. A few shots show the women in front of the basilica, once again in their colorful Zapatista masks, as seen above. One of the guitar players on the plaza is the final image that cross fades into a portion of a Mexican news broadcast reporting on Pussy Riot's performance in the cathedral and their arrest. Footage of the performance in Cathedral of Christ the Saviour shows Pussy Riot members attempting to sing while various men try to restrain them. Women in fur coats with their backs to the viewer witness the event. A female reporter speaks over the footage:

It was a mix between a heavy metal concert and a prayer vigil to Virgin Mary, whom they implored to remove Vladimir Putin from his post. The controversial protest, made in February by the punk group Pussy Riot, took place in the heart of Moscow, in Cathedral of Christ the Savior, a sacred temple to Orthodox Christians. A few days later, two alleged participants of the protest were detained.

(#Free pussyriot México)

The news footage then moves to an exterior shot of the prison where Pussy Riot is being held. Initially the prison is filmed through the metal bars or an outdoor gate. The same female reporter says “An appeal has been rejected by the courts, and the two young women face vandalism charges and a seven-year prison sentence” (*#Freepussyriot México*).

A blurred image of the “Punk Prayer” music video plays and #freepussyriot appears on the screen in white type. The viewer can clearly hear “Punk Prayer” while the credits roll over the blurred version of the “Punk Prayer” music video. This final segment leaves no doubt which “Russian Women” are being referenced in the song. The news report and excerpt from the “Punk Prayer” music video comes at the end of the #Freepussyriot México. Prior to these two segments the main connective tissue between it and the “Punk Prayer” music video are the references to the Virgin Mary. Neither group speaks to each other, but they both speak to the Virgin. She is their conduit and their fellow feminist in this diaspora.

In addition to the common conceit of praying to the Virgin Mary, the videos are tied together through visual images, such as the colorful Zapatista mask, the similarities between the Russian cathedral and the Mexican basilica, and even the singers’ “Mujeres Resistiendo” t-shirt. These images may be subtle to some, but the Mexican artists thought they were clear enough for others in the diaspora to read and felt no need to add more explicit lyrics or visuals. These Mexican artists obviously respect the Virgin Mary and were not offended by Pussy Riot’s actions, which the Russian government had categorized as “religious hatred.” In fact, Pussy Riot has addressed this misconception in interviews and public statements.

As Maria Chehonadskih, editor of the *Moscow Art Magazine*, writes: “some members of the band have stated publicly that they are truly religious, but against the Orthodox Church as a

corrupt institution” (Chehonadskih). And since their legal charges were predicated on inciting religious hatred, Pussy Riot member Nadia Tolokonnikovoy stated the following in court:

The performance at Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was committed not on the grounds of religious enmity and hatred. Equally, we harbor no hatred towards Orthodox Christians. Orthodox Christianity worships the same as we do: mercy, forgiveness, justification, love, and freedom. We are not enemies of Christianity. We care about the opinion of Orthodox Christians. We want all of them to be on our side—on the side of anti-authoritarian civil society activists. (“Pussy Riot Defense Manifesto in English”)

By framing their mission as anti-authoritarian and pro-civil society rather than anti-religion, Pussy Riot was able to successfully bridge cultural divides. Their supporters, whether members of an organized religion or not, can unite around the shared tenets of “mercy, forgiveness, justification, love, and freedom.”

Mexican Feminist Icons

La Virgen de Guadalupe

Documentary performance is powerful because it is created from and taps into lived experiences that are rich with both timely contemporary issues and embedded histories and traditions. These deeply layered connections are acutely exemplified by the video #Freepussyriot México. Upon seeing the video, I wondered why Mexican women would approve of and advocate for Pussy Riot when members were arrested for what some consider a sacrilegious act. Through lyrics such as “You are the Virgin in Heaven, and you are the Virgin on Earth,” and

“Sweet Guadalupana, sacred Mother,” these three Mexican women seem to valorize the Virgin Mary. The imagery in the video also expresses a respect for the Catholic Church; at least the grand edifice, the *Basílica de Guadalupe*. But by looking at the embodied performance in Christ the Saviour rather than the written reports of the act, I can see how Pussy Riot’s words and actions could activate a rich tradition of female activism in the name of the patron saint of The Americas, the Virgin Mary. Specifically, the “Punk Prayer” lyrics that ask “Mary, Mother of God” to save them from Putin would be an appropriate and familiar form of resistance in the eyes of Mexican women.

Now that I have described and analyzed the images Mexican women may have identified within the Pussy Riot video, I will explore the deep roots of an interconnected or what Diana Taylor describes as the “both/and” nature of colonial resistance and religious devotion in Mexico (Taylor 96). The Virgin Mary, or in the lyrics of “Punk Prayer,” “Mary, mother of God,” is more than a Christian icon. For some Mexicans, she is a connection to their Mesoamerican past even before the image of the “Brown Virgin.” As the sixteenth century Franciscan friar Bernardino de la Sahagún observed, Indigenous people of Mexico created continuity for themselves by worshipping the goddess Tonantzin, which means “our mother,” and in that same location they worshipped “Our Lady of Guadalupe” and still refer to the location as Tonantzin (44). In the words of Diana Taylor, “Instead of replacing the Pre-Conquest forms of worship with the new rituals, new rituals allowed for their continuity . . . permitting those kneeling before Guadalupe (the Virgin Mary) to direct their attention to Tonantzin” (44). This act is not surrogation, the replacement of one goddess with another, but a multiplication, or a decolonizing attitude of as both/and (96). Taylor ties this attitude to *Nepantla* and the *mestizo*, or inherently mixed identity and culture of Mexicans.

During the first period following the Conquest, the survivors of the crash spoke of inhabiting *nepantla*, the space between the indigenous and Spanish cultures.

Nepantla reflected the cracks, the liminality of a zone that was no longer just indigenous but that was not yet (and never would be) quite Spanish. Thus *mestizaje* (unlike hybridity) refers to the both/and rather than the neither/nor, the double-coded as opposed to the fragmentary sense of subjectivity. (96)

In the realm of religion and spirituality, the framework of both/and prevents Spanish Catholicism from erasing Indigenous religious practices. Instead, those practices are transferred. Mexican Catholicism is born in the liminal third space of *New Spain*, which is not wholly Spain and not wholly the Aztec Empire, but both. The ability to simultaneously hold two seemingly conflicting ideas (or in this case, conflicting religious doctrines and cultural identities) without allowing one to cancel out the other, this decolonial notion of both/and, is what I identify in the Mexican women's support of Pussy Riot.

For many Mexican feminists and activists, La Virgen de Guadalupe represents protection for the poor and dispossessed, which in the Mexican national context often means Indigenous communities and women. Therefore, she is both of the Spanish Christian tradition, but also native to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas—she is both/and. When Pussy Riot commandeered a space in the Moscow cathedral, they were not being anti-religious because through their song they ask the Virgin Mary for assistance. These activists are respectful of the Virgin and pray to her directly in order to subvert the manmade and sometimes corrupt institution that is “the church.”

Many scholars have argued that the apparition of the “Brown Virgin” was invented to convert the Indigenous population of Mexico. The Mexican legend closely mimics the

apparitions of Virgin of Guadalupe of Extremadura, in Spain. In fact, Guadalupe was originally the patroness of the birthplace of Hernán Cortés (Herrera-Sobek 1130). Cortés worshiped the Virgin, so as he baptized converts, he had them kneel before an image of the Virgin (1131). Scholars, including Mina García Soormally and Catholic priest and historian Stafford Poole, suggest that others, such as the ambitious second archbishop of Mexico/New Spain, Alonso de Montúfar, may have invented the apparitions in Tepeyac (Soormally 189). Even if this is the case, Mexicans can still claim the Virgin as their own by considering her Tonantzin.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

Expressing dissent and questioning authority while respecting religion and/or spirituality are not mutually exclusive for transnational feminists, particularly in Catholic Latin America. One of the most popular and persistent icons in Mexico and throughout Latin America, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, provides an example of intellectual curiosity, artistic virtuosity, spiritual devotion, and female rebellion in the transnational landscape of seventeenth-century colonial Mexico. Her works as a Mexican Baroque poet, playwright, theologian, and proto-feminist philosopher during the Spanish Golden Age (1492-1659) have been read throughout the Spanish-speaking world since their first publication in 1689. As an artist, Sor Juana is the first female playwright of the Americas and her plays were performed in court a century before the first professional productions in the US (Paz 12). For Mexicans, Sor Juana is a national treasure whose image appears throughout Latin America and even on the Mexican 200 pesos bill. Her work and life are part of the Mexican curriculum today, and she has been the subject of numerous films, television shows, and plays in English and Spanish, including Karen Zacarias' *The Sins of Sor Juana* (1998), *The Heresy of Love* (2012) by Helen Edmundson, and the Netflix

series *Juana Inés* (2016). Contemporary Latin American women can connect to her as the “First Feminist of the Americas” (Merrim 11).

Sor Juana was the illegitimate daughter of Spanish Captain Pedro Manuel de Asbaje and a criollo mother, Isabel Ramírez de Santillana. Criollos were those of Spanish ancestry born in the Americas, although they could have as much as 1/8 Amerindian blood and not lose their status. Her parents would have three daughters but would never marry. Isabel’s status as criollo was perhaps the reason the Captain never married her. From the moment of her birth to a First World father and Third World mother, Sor Juana was placed in the transnational and transcultural position she would occupy her entire life. While her writing was refined enough to be published in Spain and performed in court, she also created pieces with a mixture of Spanish, Latin, the native Aztec language Nahuatl, and a “Negro” dialect (Paz 11–12). In these writings she explores and reclaims her intersectional identity.

Even as a cloistered nun, Sor Juana occupied a unique position by virtue of her secular scholarship and courtly patronage that threatened and alienated her religious superiors. *La Respuesta* (1691), written as a response to criticism of her secular and artistic writing by her male superiors, has been hailed as “a defense of the rights of women to education and culture that was to find no equal—in America or in Europe—for at least a century and a half” (4). In it, she defines her lifelong love of learning as a God-given gift.

God has granted me the mercy of loving truth above all else, which is that from the moment I was first illuminated by the light of reason, my inclination toward letters has been so vehement, so overpowering, that not even the admonitions of others—and I have suffered many—nor my own

meditations—and they have not been few—have been sufficient to cause me to forswear this natural impulse that God placed in me. (29)

La Respuesta was not published until six years after her death, but it did initially circulate among her contemporaries and led to the deterioration of her relationship with her confessor Father Antonio Núñez de Miranda and her archbishop (4–5). In 1693, due to this tension, Sor Juana chose to sell the thousands of books she had amassed as well as her musical and scientific instruments and distribute the proceeds to the poor (Merrim 104).

I argue that both Pussy Riot and the Mexican singers are continuing the legacy of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Mexico's celebrated seventeenth-century nun and scholar both devoted her life to the Catholic church and wrote the first feminist treatise in the Americas, which criticized the treatment of women in the Church and in society. Sor Juana's birthplace, the village of San Miguel de Nepantla, foreshadows her destiny as a transnational Latina feminist foremother. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Nepantla is a native Nahuatl name meaning "land in the middle," and Latina feminists have reclaimed the term to describe their positionality as doubly marginalized women of color nationally and globally (Pilar Aquino et al. 7). While not women of color, the women of Pussy Riot have been welcomed by transnational feminists throughout Latin America because they chose to appeal to the Virgin Mary and resist the Russian machismo of Vladimir Putin. Their message resonates with young Latina feminists who may be devout Catholics, non-practicing "cultural" Catholics, as well as those who are not religious but subscribe to the highly spiritual ethos of Latina feminism. And their rhetoric of a world without borders resonates with transnational feminists around the world who claim that as their mission. For Latin Americans feeling persecuted by the rhetoric of "controlling the borders in the name of national security," as well as victims of and scapegoats for the failures of

neoliberal global capitalism, a world without borders may be an inviting prospect. A world without borders would be the ultimate manifestation of *convivencia*.

Conclusion

While the videos discussed above demonstrate a digital connection between Pussy Riot and Mexican feminists, this liminal space on the internet, or *Nepantla*, became a physical space in 2015. In November of that year Maria Alyokhina, one of three incarcerated members of the Pussy Riot, spoke at *La Ciudad de las Ideas* (CDI), in Puebla, Mexico. The international conference featured speakers on a variety of topics, akin to the TED conference in the United States. Rather than being received as a Russian feminist, she and her fellow Pussy Riot band members were welcomed as international champions of human rights and transnational feminism.

In this section I use the methodology created by Ric Knowles to conduct a materialist semiotic reading of Alyokhina's CDI speech. Knowles employs material semiotics for stage performances; therefore his methodology is appropriate for this video, as it was in fact a live stage performance. Knowles only used this method for stage performances he had witnessed in person, but given the proliferation of stage performances shared via video I feel it is only appropriate and useful to test the effectiveness of this method on recorded performances. (Knowles 21). In fact, modifying Knowles' process for the medium of film and video is particularly important, since only through video distribution, primarily via the Internet, a hallmark of fourth wave feminism, could these transnational exchanges occur.

Maria Alyokhina's speech at the CDI conference in Mexico can be seen as a performance that blends the secular and sacred. By analyzing the production values surrounding Alyokhina's

speech, I will attempt to detail the Conditions of Reception, or “the publicity/review discourse, front-of-house, auditorium, and audience amenities, neighborhood, transportation, ticket prices, historical/cultural moment of reception” (19). The performance begins with a rock concert-esque light display on stage, which frames a film montage with images of Pussy Riot. As he enters the stage, the announcer declares in Spanish, in a booming voice similar to the announcer at a boxing match, “Ladies and gentlemen, an epic moment for *La Ciudad de las Ideas*—Pussy Riot.” Although the crowd immediately begins to cheer, he continues “Applause, for female defenders of human rights”

The light show and volume of the announcer are sharply contrasted by the figure of Alyokhina on stage. She stands tentatively at a podium with a microphone, headset, and what appears to be her personal laptop computer. She is not tall but of average height and slim build, with shoulder-length bright red hair and pale skin. The video of her speech that I watch reminds me that this is a transnational setting. She does not speak in her native Russian but in English with Spanish subtitles on the screen. I am assuming that there were Spanish subtitles on the screen in the room for the Mexican audience of the conference. Her broken English was for the benefit of the video audience who will watch it on the American-based but internationally utilized website YouTube.

Her nervous delivery adds authenticity to her role as global outsider. Her performance is genuine and unpolished, which contrasts with the high production value of her introduction. While the CDI is often compared to the corporate-sponsored TED conference, hers is no slick, well-edited, and well-rehearsed TED talk (Castro). She is neatly dressed in an attractive black dress. She does not project the image of a criminal, hooligan, or anarchist. Instead, I see a

nervous and perhaps even frightened woman who appears passionate about her message but uncomfortable in her unfamiliar surroundings.

Another aspect of my materialist semiotic reading is the Performance Text itself, or “script, mise en scène, design, actors’ bodies, movement and gesture, etc. as reconstituted in discourse” (Knowles 19). To that end, I offer my transcription of Alyokhina’s speech as well as my observations. In the transcription I have retained the grammatical errors and mispronunciations.

Two years ago, I was put into a black car and driven away from the prison where I had been after I was arrested for protesting against Russian President Vladimir Putin. The driver left me on the empty square at the train station and said “Congratulations, you are free.” Since that time, I have been thinking, “What is the point of freedom?” There is no perfect world in which freedom is permanent. Your boss, your president, or even a god, cannot give you your freedom. Freedom is something for which we need to fight. And we need to be willing to fight for it. (CDI)

Alyokhina positions herself as one who has sacrificed and suffered for her cause. Her time in prison gives her message of freedom a sense of authority and immediacy. She invokes a liberation ideology in which not even a “god” can “give” freedom. Freedom must be taken.

First, we fight against censorship. I will not forget how every day in prison the guards made sure to control our world. They destroyed the books that I gave to other prisoners. They cut apart the articles from the journalists that supported us. That’s why we understood how important it was to have an

independent media outlet in Russia. And that's why we started Media Zona, to fight against censorship. We learned not to be afraid. (CDI)

Here Alyokhina condemns Russian authorities for not only restricting her freedom of speech, but also for erecting barriers to her relationship with her transnational supporters, her diaspora, including the people in that room. In so doing, she creates an intimacy and solidarity with the audience by naming their shared oppressor. But rather than remaining a victim, she is actively contributing to the solution by creating Media Zona. However, she does not tell the audience that it is a new independent Russian news service.

Second, we fight against borders. When people escape their homeland because of the war or a dangerous environment. They pass through countries they did not even plan to stop. Still, they are taken from trains and forced into prison-like refugee camps where they eat expired food. They have to stay inside their rooms for several months with no fresh air and good medicine treatment. They cannot even complain for fear of being punishment [*sic*] or being sent away. We fight against borders because we fight against inequality. Sorry (CDI).

(Alyokhina smiles nervously as she struggles with her speech. The audience applauds encouragingly.)

This portion of her speech offers the decolonial theme of eliminating borders. Doing so is a particularly avant-garde idea that might frighten Mexican nationalists. But she softens the message by equating borders with inequality. With the heightened security at the US/Mexican border since the September 11, 2001 attacks and the radicalized rhetoric regarding illegal

immigration from Mexico into the US., Alyokhina's otherwise provocative message is accepted as timely and relevant.

Third, we fight against oppression. When so-called power is being used to manipulate, to oppress, to control, to frighten; when the word 'power' is confused with thinking someone has a privilege over another, we started a human rights project called Justice Zone to give a voice to all those who are behind bars as we were. We believe that every fight is a gesture. And every gesture is a performance. A hunger strike in prison is a performance, like a public performance on stage. But in prison there is a wall and you are separated from the world and at some point, you think "Perhaps there is no world, maybe all this is nothing, maybe there is nothing but a prison and this gesture means nothing." And you hold on only by something unseen. And then you realize that this invisible thing is the most important thing. This is freedom (CDI).

Again, she invokes a decolonial ideology that taps into an "unseen" and potentially feminist activist community or diaspora. She shares another project, Justice Zone. Perhaps instead of nation-states with borders, she is offering a new paradigm of "Zones" or spheres of influence. This is also an avant-garde and decolonizing move but she does not offer details. She then highlights the power and sometimes futility of the unseen gesture. Here she returns to the concept of a community or diaspora created by Pussy Riot and its supporters. She names this "invisible" community, or link to the outside world, freedom. In so doing she subtly thanks her international fans, including those in the room.

Every day they say “Hands behind your back.” They say “Face to the wall.” They say “We are the authority.” They expect you to accept their rule as a law. They are the power and they are serious. So, what you can do to respond them? [*sic*] You can smile. I believe that one smile can tip the balance of power. Leaders who believe that their power is absolute do not tolerance [*sic*] smiles. They do not tolerance [*sic*] ridicule in cartoon forms or otherwise. They fight us by making us helpless. They imprison us, shoot us, but at the end of the story they lose. The provocateur and educator Voltaire said that “That there is no . . . that there was a funny. . . that if something is funny, it cannot be dangerous anymore.”

World prison authoritarianism absolutely that exists on a rules of administration which are known and need only the administration itself must be destroyed [*sic*]. No totalitarianism, no standards, no prejudice.

“No one is irreplaceable,” said Stalin. What we want to say to Stalin is “Go to hell.”

(The audience yells and applauds with approval.)

Let’s destroy this prison! No one should be forced to do anything what he can, he don’t want to do. [*sic*]

(At this point people start filing on stage and form a semi-circle behind her. She periodically looks back at them as if distracted by their movement on stage.)

If someone robs your freedom, tell them; firstly “Thank you” and then “Go fuck yourself.”

(The camera pans to a woman in the audience who winks. It is unclear if she is winking at the camera or at the speaker on stage.)

Together we can, we can do more than one by one. Freedom must belong to us, not oligarchs who take power. This applies to any society. (CDI)

Alyokhina then nods to a woman on stage who is holding a microphone and standing at the far end of a semicircle. The woman speaks into the microphone and tells the audience what freedom means to her. When she finishes, she passes the microphone to the next person and then puts on a brightly colored ski mask. Some of the Mexican women and men in the semicircle speak in English and some in Spanish. Each repeats the actions of stating their definition of freedom and then punctuating their statement by putting on a colorful ski mask after passing the microphone to the next person. By the time the last person has spoken we see a stage full of “Pussy Riot impersonators.” Music plays and everyone on stage begins to dance.

The visual metaphor of multiple Pussy Rioters is a fitting end to Alyokhina’s speech and this chapter. Through her performance, Alyokhina taps into a feminist activist diaspora and creates a moment of togetherness or *convivencia*. By inviting Mexicans to join her on stage and

don a mask that is legible through several cultural lenses and by having individuals declare their own definition of freedom, Alyokhina recognizes the importance of both unity and various national and cultural identities. Doing so is an act of critical intersectionality embraced by fourth wave feminism.

By unknowingly employing recognizable signs of feminist resistance to the patriarchy through documentary performance, Pussy Riot engages in a transnational and transcultural feminist discourse on sexism, corruption, and religious tyranny experienced by women around the world. Their decision to document their actions and share them through the Internet is a decolonizing strategy because their message could transcend fixed geopolitical borders. In response, a group of Mexican men and women showed solidarity with Pussy Riot through a documentary performance which was both culturally specific and at the same time familiar to members of the feminist activist diaspora. The digital third space, or *Nepantla*, was brought into the physical world when Maria Alyokhina not only spoke at CDI but visited fellow activists in the diaspora. After the conference, Alyokhina and her fellow Pussy Riot bandmate Ksenia Zhivago met with members of H.I.J.O.S., a human rights organization pressuring the Mexican government to investigate the disappearance of 43 missing students who may have been kidnapped by drug cartels (Castro). For the Mexican artist who made #Freepussyriot México, Pussy Riot has joined a genealogy of rebellious feminist activist including Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz and the mothers of H.I.J.O.S.

In the conclusion chapter that follows I connect the performances discussed in this chapter to *The People's Temple* and the EGH project from the previous two chapters. Each case study provides a model for how documentary performance and utopian performatives can be deployed to foster *convivencia*.

Conclusion

You know there's a term "up south" and "down south." We were trying to cope with "up south." Down south you knew you can't drink water out of this fountain. You can't go to this school. Up here the behaviors were subtle.

Dr. Carl Brown, Former President NAACP, Tacoma, Washington

Tacoma's Civil Rights Struggle - African Americans Leading the Way (2008)

That's just Tacoma. I prefer the South because I like straight-up racism.

Shauna Weatherby, Registered Nurse, Tacoma, Washington

Start All Over: A Tacoma Civil Rights Performance Walk (2018)

Ultimately, my interest in the case studies treated in the previous three chapters centers on the efficacy and applicability of various forms of documentary performance in terms of undergraduate and graduate pedagogy, civic engagement and discourse, and political coalition-building. What do these performances *do* as processes and products? After all, "to perform" means to "make something happen." How did the EGH project fulfill its pedagogical and community engagement goals? When is it appropriate to address community trauma through a documentary play like *The People's Temple*? What kinds of networks can be established and/or revealed through digital documentary performances like the #Free pussyriot México video?

In the pages that follow I revisit these projects as well as my findings in order to demonstrate how documentary performance can be deployed in various forms and for distinct goals such as critical pedagogy, community engagement, civic discourse, community healing, and political resistance and solidarity across borders. Regardless of their differences, in each case

documentary performance provides fertile ground for utopian performatives, or moments when those involved feel deep empathy with those sharing the performance experience, even if those individuals are strangers. This use of the term utopia is a queering of the concepts that seeks to reclaim it from its historical uses. In this definition utopian performatives can come from or can facilitate a state of *convivencia*, or the Latina feminist notion of coexisting and intentionally being together to produce art, social justice, or decolonial work.

Being together and sharing a physical and/or ideological space is key because such work is daunting, as it requires individuals and groups to push against entrenched power structures such as patriarchy and neoliberalism as well as the legacies of colonialism and slavery. Artists and activists, or within the framework of Latina feminism, *artivistas*, must believe that their art and actions can produce change—if not individually, perhaps collectively. Reaching *convivencia*, the sense of being together and working toward a similar goal, whether in-person or in cyberspace, is the ultimate counteroffensive to systems that establish hierarchies of human value, such as race, class, and gender. *Convivencia* does not erase difference, but rather it embraces the Latina feminist notion of both/and. *Artivistas*, such as the women of Pussy Riot and the Mexican singers of #Freepussyriot México, can coalesce around shared oppression and forms of resistance, and simultaneously celebrate their ethnic and cultural differences.

Before reviewing the previous case studies, I would like to share how I have employed what I have learned through this study and applied it to a recent documentary performance. To truly investigate the process and efficacy of documentary performance as a means of creating *convivencia*, I needed to embrace the methodology of practice as research (PaR) as detailed in Chapter One. So, armed with the knowledge I gained on the EGH project, as well as my study of

The People's Temple and the digital storytelling exemplified in the Pussy Riot videos and #Freepussyriot México, I embarked on my own documentary performance project.

Inspired by the history of the NAACP and the Civil Rights movement in Tacoma, Washington, I collaborated with theatre scholar and historian Dr. Sara Freeman, Professor of Theatre at the University of Puget Sound, to devise a performance walk—an interactive and site-specific tour of historic locations that incorporated oral histories (either written, recorded, or performed). We envisioned a tour of the historically African American Hilltop neighborhood in Tacoma, Washington, the site of previous civil rights activism and current gentrification. We planned to premiere the walk at the 2018 Race and Pedagogy National Conference at the University of Puget Sound (UPS), to be followed by a panel discussion or workshops. The project would also commemorate the tenth anniversary of the *Tacoma Civil Rights Project*, a 2008 exhibition at the Washington State History Museum, and the documentary film by Sid Lee, *Tacoma's Civil Rights Struggle: African Americans Leading the Way*, while building on these works. We named our project *Start All Over: A Tacoma Civil Rights Performance Walk*.

A performance walk is an interactive theatre form that turns the geography of a city into a performance and a space for changed perception and reflection. Often, performance walks take place with audience members walking singly or in small groups along a prescribed route while wearing headphones and listening to a soundtrack of dialogue, songs, descriptive or analytic passages, personal testimonies, oral histories or narratives about events in the places through which they are walking. Through historical discovery, dramaturgical assessment, and community engagement, scholars and community members create this artistic work in order to conduct research with analytical and performative outcomes. Given that this form of site-specific performance uses nonfictional locations for a portion of its “text,” certain iterations can be

considered documentary performance, similar to *The People's Temple*, and community-based performance, similar to the EGH project. The goals of this performance walk project were to memorialize local activism, archive stories, and bring this history to bear on current civil rights issues and discourses in the Pacific Northwest and the nation.

We named the performance walk *Start All Over: A Tacoma Civil Rights Performance Walk*, after the Tracy Chapman song “New Beginning” from the 1995 album of the same name. The goals of commemorating the past, celebrating local activism, and activating new conversations in the processes are expressed in the lyrics of this song. For example, Chapman writes,

The world is broken into fragments and pieces
 That once were joined together in a unified whole
 But now too many stand alone—there's too much separation
 We can resolve to come together in the new beginning
 Start all over (Chapman)

While the Hilltop was created from the discriminatory practice of redlining and housing segregation, the shared identity and experience of this community brought them together to build a social and political network that thrives to this day. We can all learn something from the leaders of the Hilltop, past and present. By coming together in *convivencia* to study the past we can create something new and find a better way to be together in the present.

As we prepared for this project, Dr. Freeman and I considered examples such as the work of the Australian art collective One Step At A Time Like This. Described as “participatory, locative, and site-responsive works,” their performance pieces are “place-responsive and conversation-based works, focusing on the activity of the audience as an essential element in the

work” (*One Step*). We studied their *En Route* series, created in 2011, where audiences tour urban settings such as Melbourne, East London, and Seoul, Korea. Audience members wear headphones and are guided by a recording with directions, music, and descriptions. Specifically, we looked at “Undreamed Shores,” a collaboration with Chicago Shakespeare Theater, which took audience members through the area surrounding Chicago’s Navy Pier (*Chicago Shakespeare Theater: Undreamed Shores*). Writing about it for the Chicago Tribune in 2016, theater critic Chris Jones described the tour as “a thrilling, complex, multisensory journey around our city in all its beauty and ugliness” (C. Jones). This was the kind of experience we wanted to create for audience members. We wanted to show the rich history, urban beauty, and economic ugliness of redlining and gentrification of the Hilltop. Our hope was to help people encounter the familiar in a new way, thereby igniting discussion and possibly activism. By shedding new light on familiar locations, “Undreamed Shores” was successful in making locals contemplate their space. In the words of Jones, “You have been made to think about why you live where you do and what all that means” (C. Jones). Like the EGH project, we wanted this performance walk to be deeply rooted in the local space and offer students and audience members a chance to discover, re-discover, and/or celebrate this neighborhood.

In addition to studying practitioners of site-specific and immersive performance, we read scholarship on these forms. One particularly insightful piece was “Walks of Experience: Site-Specific Performance Walks, Active Listening, and Uncomfortable Witnessing,” by Emile Pine, Maeve Casserly, and Tom Lane. Utilizing case studies from Israel and Ireland, the authors highlight the value as well as the risks of this work, including voyeurism, appropriation, and “the disconnection of private headphone experience” (Pine et al.). These were real concerns for us. While Dr. Freeman lives in Tacoma, she is not a resident of the Hilltop neighborhood and is not

African American, nor am I. We knew that local African American participation in the building as well as the execution of the project would be key. As I learned from the EGH project, working with local community members would require an art-making process that suited the needs of the community, not our own.

To that end, we looked to similar community-engaged local projects as a road map for how to proceed. In conjunction with the students of their Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Course *Doing Community History*, Professors Michael Honey and Michael Sullivan of the University of Washington, Tacoma, have developed the Tacoma Community History Project. This digital archive houses historical research and interviews documenting Tacoma's history (*Tacoma Community History Project*). Housing the project in the course meant that students, many of whom are Tacoma residents, had agency over the work being produced.

Process: Undergraduate Pedagogy

Along with using Performance as Research to engage with the community, bear witness to the history of Civil Rights in Tacoma, and participate in social change in the present, we were also interested in the pedagogical opportunities such a project might offer undergraduate students. Therefore, one aspect of our methodology was to house the project in the University of Puget Sound's Theatre Arts Department, specifically in the undergraduate course Theatre 323: *Project in Dramaturgy*. Dr. Freeman was the instructor of record and I volunteered to co-facilitate the class, assist with syllabus development, and lead specific workshops on interview skills and digital storytelling. The course objectives included analytical and creative aspects of theatre study and functioned as a workshop. Students would move from archival research to experiential exploration to produce a culminating digital story and proposed performance walk

based on Tacoma history in and around the Hilltop neighborhood. Collaborating with undergraduates and community members provided the opportunity to assess the pedagogical implications of this process and the resulting work. Creating digital archival material also became a key element of this work.

Similar to the EGH project, we wanted to broaden students' notion of education by having them learn about the city surrounding their campus community. Not unlike the students at the University of Washington, UPS students had not regularly ventured far from campus and knew little about the various neighborhoods in Tacoma. The course also gave them a chance to study the history of the University itself. In fact, while exploring primary sources in the school library's archives and special collections, one student discovered images of a KKK rally on campus and another found old editorials about the pros and cons of desegregating student housing. A theater student located images of a black-faced minstrel performance which took place during the 1964-65 academic year, in the same theater where that student was currently performing a play.

Since the performance walk centered the African American experience in Tacoma, we partnered with the African American Studies Department to cross-list this course as both Theatre Arts and African American Studies. Unfortunately, even with the cross-listing no African American students or students majoring in African American studies enrolled. Given the lack of African American representation in our class, we decided to partner with Dr. Grace Livingston, professor of African American Studies and an active member of the Tacoma African American community. Dr. Livingston helped us determine which community members to meet and invite to our class. While the approximately twenty students in the class were not all Theatre Arts majors, they were all involved in the theatre community at the university.

To prepare students for thoughtful community-engaged research and art-making, the course introduced students to documentary and political theatre traditions, community-based theater, interview techniques, public scholarship, and digital storytelling. The course had three distinct sections. First students were introduced to scholarship, then they met community artists and community leaders while conducting archival and field research. Lastly, they created and presented their imagined performance walk.

The class began by reading and discussing scholarship on these performance genres and key moments in Tacoma history. For example, I led an interview workshop utilizing the introduction to Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror* and Robin De Angelo's *White Fragility* to discuss power and positionality in the interview process. As mentioned earlier, while there were a few students of color in the course, none were African American. We wanted to further explore strategies for responsibly and respectfully engaging with the history of civil rights activism in Tacoma's African American community. As with the EGH project, to pursue this education goal, we had to leave campus.

We brought the students to the Tacoma Historical Society (THS) to view their contemporaneous exhibit, *Dreams That Matter*. Funded by the Puyallup Tribe, the exhibit told the stories of Tacoma's "heroes who have worked for social justice and civil rights." Run by former UPS faculty member Dr. William H. Baarsma, THS is a nexus for archival work and civic commemoration. During our tour I learned that THS was planning a celebratory dinner and speaking event to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Tacoma's Human Rights Commission and the founding of the first Black Student Union at the UPS, which was also the first Black Student Union in the State of Washington. Utilizing my research funds and the THS's access to archival photos, I was able to create a large photo display for the dinner and for our performance

walk. By volunteering at their dinner, I met and made connections with key members of the Hilltop community, most notably, Harold Moss, Tacoma's first African American mayor.

To consider the difficult aspects of Tacoma's history, students met up with local writer and historian Tamiko Nimura in downtown Tacoma to complete a walking tour of the remnants of Tacoma's *Nihonmachi*, or Japantown, prior to Japanese incarceration. I was unable to attend the tour, but students' reactions mirrored the information shared in Nimura's article, *What Remains: A Tour of Tacoma's Japantown*. The article notes that the tour was created in conjunction with the local production *Nihonjin Face*, an original play by Janet Hayakawa and Tere Martínez, commissioned for the 75th anniversary of Executive Order 9066, authorizing Japanese incarceration during World War II, or what some refer to as internment (Nimura). This anniversary brought to mind the lessons from *The People's Temple*, which was commissioned for the anniversary of the Jonestown tragedy. Our performance walk could be a site for healing, or at least reckoning with, the redlining and housing discrimination which led to the Hilltop being a primarily African American community.

Nihonjin Face and the walking tour were part of a citywide Day of Remembrance for Tacoma. Much of the tour centered on the loss of people and places. There wasn't "very much to see in the present," Nimura writes. "So much of this tour is a tangible measurement of unnecessary loss." She mused on the irony of touring places that no longer exist and asking people to "find meaning in a muddy and hilly corner, surrounded by a chain link fence" (Nimura). Tour participants learned about the role the local area played in the national policy. While on the tour, they stood less than 15 miles away from "Camp Harmony" and the nation's first "assembly center" that processed Japanese citizens for incarceration (Nimura). Through this experience participants were able to enact remembrance, a key element of documentary

performance. While generating discussion and activism around current issues of discrimination is always important, the act of remembering is itself a powerful mode of documentary performance as it combats the erasure caused by these injustices.

Similarly, *The People's Temple* was a vehicle for community remembrance and healing. The devising process required meaningful engagement with survivors, Temple family members, and local civic leaders and historians. Watching the play, and possibly participating in a post-show discussion, was the cathartic conclusion to their participation. We needed to consider how both our process and product would ethically engage with community members and their memories. In that vein, Nimura writes, "Days of Remembrance remind us that at its best, the work of history can be a collective, communal, and healing practice. Despite how painfully relevant the anniversaries of Japanese American incarceration have felt, I believe it's time for Tacoma to remember its own history again" (Nimura). On several occasions, throughout our research and art-making process, these words rang in my ears.

Bringing our class into the community was so important that we did it several times, including a research day at the Tacoma Library's Northwest Room, which houses some of the "most comprehensive and accessible local and regional history information available to the public" (*Northwest Room*). The collection features "Tacoma city directories dating back to 1885, early to current newspapers, record indexes, maps, photos, postcards, manuscript collections, architectural plans" (*Northwest Room*). Not only were students given access to these collections, but the librarian showed students how to find materials and gave them context for understanding what they were seeing. For example, she explained the collection of local Green Books. These were guides, originally created by Victor Hugo Green, that provided a list of restaurants, hotels, neighborhoods, and service providers available and friendly to African

American motorists during the Jim Crow era. The Tacoma City Association of Colored Women's Clubs published a Green Book Directory specifically for the Tacoma area, and many of the businesses listed were in the Hilltop (Tacoma City Association of Colored Women's Clubs). Students had never heard of Green Books and were surprised that they would be needed in Washington state. Just the existence of this artifact pointed to the discrimination that existed not just in the South but also in the West. They were also evidence of a "parallel universe" or "secret road map" that connected Black neighborhoods like the Hilltop throughout the country (Richen).

Of course, taking the students on a walking tour of the Hilltop was essential. We began at People's Community Center (also known as People's Center), a recreation center on Martin Luther King Jr. Way, in the heart of the Hilltop. The center houses a fitness center, child care and recreation programs, rental space for events, and a community pool. The pool is a key feature of this African American neighborhood, because segregated community pools existed throughout the United States into the 1970's and after the 1964 Civil Rights Act, many closed down rather than desegregate (Wolcott).

Run by Metro Parks Tacoma, the People's Community Center is often referred to by locals as the Malcom X Center, the original name of the building until the City of Tacoma took over the space and changed the name. But the name lives on in the mural depicting the Center on the exterior wall, which labels it MALCOM X CENTER in large blue letters. The mural also depicts local civil rights leaders. A picture of the mural with captions identifying these leaders can be found on the Center's website. The mural was the result of a "Mural Training and Community Engagement Project . . . designed specifically to create professional development opportunities for emerging artists of color in the area" ("People's Community Center"). Training program artists were also commissioned to create art to display inside the center. Much of the art

is Afrocentric in nature, including a painting of an African American woman swimming and an American flag in the shape of the African continent. Other pieces celebrate and/or memorialize the Hilltop, such as an interactive topographical map of the neighborhood that plays oral histories and various recordings when touched.

Once we toured the interior and exterior of People's Center, students ventured off in teams to see and document, through notes and photographs, elements of the neighborhood. These included the many churches in the area, and businesses that have been in existence for decades such as Johnson Candy Company and the Fish House Café, referred to by locals as "The Fish Store." In addition to selling fried fish and comfort food, "The Fish Store" is where residents can buy African American newspapers such as the *Tacoma True Citizen* and is often a meeting place for community organizers. Through this exercise students met community members and gained embodied knowledge about what makes the Hilltop unique, in order to represent these stories with respect and responsibility.

In addition to bringing our students into the community, we invited local artists and civic leaders to our class. Artist and performer Chevi Chung came to speak about her theater company empathos, which produced *The Chinese Question: The Tacoma Method*, a new play exploring actions and events that led to the 1885 expulsion of Chinese citizens by Tacoma residents. This infamous chapter in Tacoma history is often referred to as "The Tacoma Method," giving the play its subtitle ("2018 Excerpts from *The Chinese Question*").

Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards, the first African American female to hold the office, joined us and discussed her life as a Tacoma resident and African American activist. She also explained the significance of the Mother's Day Disturbance of 1969. On that day violence erupted in the Hilltop after claims of police violence against a local resident. Property was

damaged, arrests were made, and a police officer was wounded by gun fire. Local African American leaders, including “Thomas Dixon, executive director of Tacoma Urban League; Harold Moss, who would become Tacoma's first black mayor in 1994; and James L. Walton, who would become Tacoma's first black city manager in 2003,” went out into the streets of the Hilltop to keep the peace, and they were successful (“Tacoma Held It Together after MLK’s Death. Racial Strife Exploded a Year Later”). Tacoma historians characterize this incident as “a turning point in Tacoma, Washington’s civil rights struggle” (Johns). It demonstrated local African American leadership, which directly resulted in more Black representation on the City Council, and gave birth to The Black Collective, an African American volunteer organization that, to this day, meets weekly to address issues affecting the Black community of Tacoma and Pierce County (The Black Collective, “Civic Engagement through Volunteer Service”).

The course culminated in a video slideshow of historical research and a performance walk proposal from each student group. Informed by their archival research and the theoretical frameworks they studied; students could propose a performance walk in any area of Tacoma. The route needed to be walkable in 40-45 minutes by people of a range of ages and physical abilities. Students had to investigate ways their walk could accommodate wheelchair users or people with other mobility issues. We encouraged groups to walk their proposed route and consult with Dr. LaToya Bracket’s class on Public Scholarship to consider how successful public art is implemented.

Final performance walk proposals were presented in class and included a map, a list of directions, historical and artistic images of the space, and a narrative that included key figures and locations that would be discussed on the walk. Students also had to identify an overarching theme for their walk and how they would engage with community partners before, during, and

after the walk. These proposed performance walks inspired our work in the Hilltop and brought to life stories about the Japanese American, African American, and college student experience in Tacoma.

African American Women

During the course of the semester Dr. Freeman and I conducted our performance walk research alongside our students. One of our earliest and most consequential interviews occurred in Dr. Freeman's minivan, when we drove the streets of Hilltop with Ms. Williebelle "Bil" Moss, the first president of the Tacoma Urban League, the first executive director of Planned Parenthood of Pierce County, and the former wife of Mayor Harold Moss. As we passed churches, businesses, parks, the People's Center, and streets named for local and national leaders, we listened to her memories and asked questions. This interview was so valuable that we knew we needed to continue this type of ethnographic research.

To that end, Dr. Freeman and Dr. Livingston planned a story circle tea hosted by Ms. Bil. The story circle was a site for prominent African American women such as Kay Littles, Linda Isham, Shauna Weatherby, and Billie Johnstone to reflect on their impression of the Pacific Northwest and their strategies for combating overt and covert racism. Employing the women of color feminist practice *convivencia*, or the deliberate convening that builds coalitions for social justice work and knowledge creation, Dr. Freeman, Dr. Livingston, and I participated in the conversation at times, but for the most part we listened, took notes, and asked clarifying questions.

Our archival research uncovered a significant amount of material on the activism of African American men in the Hilltop, but much less on the women of the community. Therefore,

this ethnographic work was a means of gathering oral histories from women through a process that was led by them. We did so in a familiar and collaborative setting that offered an opportunity for celebration and connection.

Logistics

Such site-specific projects often necessitate coordination with the local government and other area institutions to allow for access to, mobility through, and display in these sites. Therefore, the actual form and content is often shaped by logistical rather than artistic factors. In the end, logistical obstacles and time constraints prevented us from executing the performance walk as we had planned. Instead, Dr. Freeman and I, along with a UPS undergraduate student researcher, Elliot Ash, produced an aural rather than physical tour of the Hilltop. We created sound collages representing the main thematic findings of the project: 1) *Up South: How Tacoma Does Racism*, 2) *The Importance of African American Role Models*, 3) *Redlining and Gentrification*, and 4) *Hilltop Glory Days: Then & Now*. At the 2018 Race and Pedagogy National Conference, we premiered the sound collages which were compiled from newly captured oral histories and the Sid Lee documentary.

Convened by The Race and Pedagogy Institute (RPI), an initiative of the University of Puget Sound, the quadrennial Race and Pedagogy National Conference that brings together scholars, students, community members, as well as K-12 and postsecondary educators to think critically about race equity in education (Race & Pedagogy Institute, University of Puget Sound). The coalition of individuals and organizations that constitute RPI develop programs and events to facilitate their mission of transforming society and eliminating racism (Vision & Mission,

University of Puget Sound). Among these are the Race and Pedagogy Journal published twice a year and the quadrennial Race and Pedagogy National Conference.

“Radically Reimagining Justice: Narratives of Rupture, Resilience, and Liberation,” was the theme for the 2018 conference and the perfect encapsulation of the ideas expressed in our sound collages. Editing the various oral histories was not unlike devising *Every Girl's a Hero* in the EGH project. In both cases, verbatim quotes and otherwise dry data were made more memorable and impactful through curation, which offered an artistic rendering of the documentary information. Much like a collage, audio clips were given a new dimension by comparing or contrasting them with each other. For example, we were taken by the idea of “Up South,” a term neither I nor Dr. Freeman had encountered before this project. We first heard it in Sid Lee’s 2008 documentary, in which Dr. Carl Brown, Tacoma resident and former President of the local chapter of the NAACP, uses it to compare the covert racism he experienced on the West Coast to the overt racism in the South. He states,

You know there’s a term “up south” and “down south.” We were trying to cope with “up south.” To me “up south” would be no different than the behaviors of European Americans in Texas. Down south you knew you can’t drink water out of this fountain. You can’t go to this school. Those type of controls. Up here the behaviors were subtle. (Lee and Tacoma Civil Rights Project)

Subtle controls and unspoken rules of racism in Tacoma was a motif echoed by many of the African American women we interviewed. The sound collages were therefore an opportunity to put their testimonies in conversation with Brown, whose comments were recorded ten years earlier.

In this excerpt from the sound collage, *Up South: How Tacoma Does Racism*, we hear Harold Moss, the first African Mayor of Tacoma in his 2008 interview with Sid Lee, in conversation with Billie Johnstone and Shauna Weatherby who attended our story circle tea in 2018.

Harold Moss: Discrimination here was different and the same

Billie Johnstone: God, Tacoma is not the street of gold that I had thought it was. That here's all this undercover, underground, we knew what to expect in the South, you know, but all of this pretense and I just thought that was awful.

Harold Moss: Coming from Detroit you knew where to go, where not to go, you knew what the rules were. You get out to this new land and you don't know.

Shauna Weatherby: Tacoma, in terms of race relations, I've always been the only Black in any job I ever had. I've dealt with microaggressions and straight up racism everywhere I've gone. People have followed me in stores and I've had to say "Do I look like I am going to steal something? Because if I do, I've got news for you. I could buy anything I want in this store. And if you keep following me, I'm going to sue you." That's just Tacoma. I prefer the South because I like straight up racism. (*Start All Over*)

By placing these quotes side by side in our sound collage we could express the specific type of racism that is often experienced in Tacoma and the midfields that locals and newcomers to Tacoma had to navigate. The conversation also shares important information about the Tacoma

African American experience such as being the only Black person at work, dealing with microaggressions and racial profiling and the false notion of the West as a land free of racism. Most importantly, listeners hear how these situations persist in testimonies given a decade apart and the type of powerful self-talk employed by African Americans to overcome these entrenched forms of prejudice.

In some ways, the editing process, again like the devising process, was a utopian move. The words of African American men and women that might otherwise go unheard or appreciated could be isolated, highlighted, and amplified. Through sound collages, people who never met or who lived in different time periods spoke to each other—confirming, commiserating, and celebrating their tactics of resistance against their shared oppression.

Graduate Pedagogy and Scholarship

During this time, I was completing my Certificate in Public Scholarship through the University of Washington's Simpson Center for the Humanities. As part of this process, I studied theoretical frameworks in Humanities 594: *Introduction to Public Scholarship*, and found the concepts of responsible community collaboration and the co-creation of knowledge with civic partners ideal for the performance walk. The project, therefore, served as my certificate capstone, in the hope that it could contribute to the growing corpus of public scholarship from urban-serving universities. I also applied for and received a Mellon Summer Fellowship for New Public Projects in the Humanities, which provided financial support and put me in touch with a cohort of fellow graduate student public scholars.

My undergraduate teaching is a key component of my graduate education and part of my mission as a public scholar. Through teaching and mentorship, I show students the relevance of

the Arts and Humanities in their daily lives, and I have benefited from the ways they challenge the traditional paradigm of knowledge production. For me, teaching is a dialogue with undergraduates that expands my conceptions of possible scholarly work and informs my research questions. Developing *Theatre 323: Project in Dramaturgy* was therefore part of my research and professional preparation.

For the first stage of the project and the course, I surveyed archival research and conducted a literature review resulting in an annotated bibliography used for research and course development purposes. I also gathered information on devising and performance techniques for social justice work and community-based art. By collaborating on this undergraduate course, I expanded my experience and knowledge as a practitioner of public scholarship. I also provided students at UPS, which has very few graduate students given its limited number of graduate programs, with the training and mentorship necessary to conduct original research.

Projects like this performance walk offer an example for further iterations of graduate education as engaged community partnership. Graduate students should do more than occupy the space where they live and learn. They should leave graduate school with an education of the community that has been the birthplace of their scholarly career. Both the UW Seattle campus and the UPS campus in Tacoma exist within their respective cities but also as communities unto themselves. While both are situated in urban settings, the physical campuses, with their abundant trees, picturesque views, and well-manicured grounds, contrast starkly with the more industrial and less well-resourced areas of each city. As detailed in the Chapter One, only blocks from the UW campus are campsites for those experiencing homelessness. Unsheltered teens often make the streets of the University District their home. At UPS and UW, I have heard both graduate and undergraduate students use the term “bubble” to describe the confines of their college

experience. Students can have all their needs met without venturing far from campus. They may only visit other neighborhoods in the city for food, entertainment, or recreation and then quickly return to their campus “bubble.” Neighborhoods that don’t offer these types of amusements remain outside of their scope of reference. I can attest to this experience. As someone who moved to Washington state from California and lives a short bus ride from campus, until these projects, I rarely had the time or motivation to explore beyond my bubble. Wanting to establish my career in the Puget Sound Area and specifically by doing community-engaged work, these opportunities have been invaluable for growing my network and skills, and have led to teaching and public speaking engagements throughout the region. Without the chance to continue my education by leaving the classroom, I would not have made these connections.

I now look forward to publishing on this project, as it is an example of self-directed graduate education that builds meaningful and lasting networks. By sharing this work, I hope to highlight the need for support systems and institutions such as the Simpson Center for the Humanities that function as a conduit between academic research and community dialogue. In a political climate where postsecondary arts and humanities programs are increasingly competing for resources with STEM and vocational programs, the need to promote our work and build professional relationships is critical. Arts and humanities scholars must share what they do and promote the immediate and long-term relevance and impact of their academic pursuits by reframing all scholarship as public scholarship.

Next Steps

It remains to be seen if we will be able to one day offer the walk as a piece of public performance on its own or in conjunction with the next Race and Pedagogy conference.

Regardless, the process of building the walk and the undergraduate course were invaluable and I plan on publishing a scholarly article about the piece in the future. Such an article will contribute to scholarship on site-specific, devised, and community-based theater as well as work in performance studies, performative ethnography, public scholarship, and critical pedagogy. In reviewing the scholarship on similar projects, I have found that few articles provide a detailed description of “how” the performance walks are crafted. So, while the impact and theoretical underpinnings of this piece are important to document, to truly contribute to a deficiency in the scholarship on performance walks I must continue to document and examine the process as well as the product.

By applying my insights and ideas about documentary performance to the actual creation of community-based documentary performance with *Start All Over: A Tacoma Civil Rights Performance Walk*, I learned that performance is just as important as process. In fact, the process can be so rich and satisfying that a practitioner can get lost deep in the woods of process and struggle to find the circuitous path that will lead them back to producing a product. This is partially what happened to us with the performance walk. Teaching and community-engaged research took time away from nailing down the details needed to bring the project to life. I am happy we produced and shared our sound collages. That product provided a sense of closure and achievement for ourselves and our community partners.

One of the hallmarks of critical pedagogy is the iterative nature of the learning process. Students and teachers learn from each other and they learn together as they simultaneously engage in new information. This process was apparent throughout the course of *Theatre 323: Project in Dramaturgy*. Dr. Freeman and I taught students about documentary performance, political theatre, and digital storytelling. Students taught us about the Tacoma history they were

uncovering, as well as their perceptions of the city before, during, and after the process. Together we learned about Tacoma's lost Japantown, Green Books, and the people of the People's Center. Elliot Ash, the undergraduate researcher who worked with us on the performance walk the summer after the class ended, was able to take this paid position because of the knowledge he had gained. Housing such projects within an undergraduate or graduate course can be a rich environment for critical pedagogy because everyone gets a chance to be a student and a teacher. The one liability of such an arrangement is that teaching and the unpredictable nature of such a community-engaged course can take one's attention away from art making.

Lastly, I learned that even without utopian performatives, which didn't occur since the walk itself was never implemented, moments of *convivencia* can form attachments and affiliations. Like the EGH project, a shift occurred during the research process when I became less of a Tacoma-outsider. I was not an insider per se, but I knew and understood people, places, and histories that an outsider would not know. This sense crystallized for me when we picked Ms. Bil up for our driving interview of the Hilltop and she greeted me with a kiss on the cheek. Dr. Freeman and I were no longer strangers or just researchers, but women within her network that, like her, cherish the Hilltop community and their stories. I know I can turn to her and several other Tacoma community partners for support on future projects that exemplify and promote our shared values of justice, storytelling, and community. I turn now to my final thoughts on each of my earlier case studies and the utopian power of *convivencia* exemplified in these distinct modes of documentary performance.

Every Girl's A Hero

The EGH project highlights three key areas of documentary performance—reciprocal community relationships, critical/utopian pedagogy, and utopian performatives—and how women of color feminism exists within each. The EGH project also demonstrates the interconnected nature of documentary performance, and the methodologies of devising and performance ethnography. All of these methods are manifestations of women-of-color feminist thought, because they value collective action, a reimagining of social structures, process as well as product, and, most importantly, equitable partnerships. To that end, choosing the appropriate model for community participation is key to responsible community collaborations. As stated in Chapter One, the spectrum of community participation starts with Performance as Research (PaR), work done to pursue performance scholarship, on one end, and Community-Based Performance (CBP) on the other. Ideally in CBP, artists and community members co-create every aspect of a piece devised primarily for the benefit of the community. I am not placing any value judgments on these various modes, but rather I appreciate their inherent characteristics and the fact that some projects live in the middle of the spectrum or may be a hybrid of approaches, like PearlDamour's *Skies Over Seattle* and *Milton*.

Regardless of the approach, to ensure that partners are the subjects and not the objects of the artistic work, the artists must be willing to re-imagine the art making process. We failed to do this in the EGH project. We didn't create a timeline or do our devising in a space that was easily accessible to EGH clients. Nor did we ask for their input on sound or stage design, or workshop our piece for them during the devising process. Doing so could have improved the quality of the piece by addressing, for example, the issue of transgender representation, or the importance of pets at the EGH. These interactions also could have improved the reception of the piece, as the

members of EGH might have felt a greater sense of authorship and agency over the final performance piece. Even without these changes, *Every Girl's A Hero* was received with enthusiasm and I attribute that to our months of work-exchange hours at the EGH. Volunteering and spending time in the space allowed us to witness and then capture moments that truly resonated with EGH clients and staff. In the words of EGH Director Ruth Herold, the women felt “H-S-L, Heard, Seen, and Loved” (Herold Interview 2016).

As a pedagogical endeavor, EGH taught me and my fellow students that sometimes, to become truly educated, you have to leave the classroom. With the proliferation of devised, site-specific, ensemble-generated, and community-based performances, this training is critical for theatre artists as well as those pursuing qualitative and ethnographic research. Practitioners learn from “dwelling” in community. Doing so builds trust with participants and crucial observation skills. One learns to listen and ask questions without looking for specific answers.

In terms of critical pedagogy, the EGH project meets some of these tenets by awakening critical consciousness and addressing injustice through action and self-reflection. The project was utopian because it moved us away from all-or-nothing thinking and into a place of possibilities. Even if we as students and artists could not *solve* homelessness, our community’s most pressing issues, we could do *something*. We could learn, build community, donate our time and resources, and become part of a network of artists and advocates, or in terms of women of color feminism, *artistas*.

The feminist-of-color concept of *convivencia*, the Spanish term meaning coexist, is what Katie Pearl calls “spending time in community.” This method values the process as well as the product. I learned as much, if not more, from the process of the EGH project, as was the case with *Start All Over Again: A Tacoma Civil Rights Performance Walk*, as I did from delivering

the product. The product is key because it is an offering to our community partners and hopefully reflects back to them themes that they do not always notice because of their proximity to the issues at hand. But if the process is not equitable and does not involve some form of *convivencia*, a living process that builds relationships, then, for me, it hasn't reached its fullest potential regardless of the merits of the final product. An equitable, inclusive, and nimble process is essential to creating a product that not only shows the community something, but also offers a space for co-creation. Such spaces generate utopian performatives and plant the seeds for new understanding, new connections, and even transformation.

In addition to skill building and meaningful community engagement, which are invaluable aspects of these projects, I assert that utopian performatives are in fact the most powerful outcomes, because they create a glimpse into a more interconnected and just society. Utopian performatives can be key tools for a women-of-color feminist pedagogical mode that forges new connections and alternative societal structures between universities and community organizations. Although utopian performatives are ephemeral by nature, they can be a catalyst for new relationships, lasting collaborations, or in my case, a commitment to noticing, creating, and harnessing these moments of unbridled hope.

Our time with EGH also lives on in the promotional video my fellow student, Sean Ryan, produced for the organization. To this day, the video is featured on the EGH website and documents the value EGH provides to the community through the words of clients and staff. Ruth Herold asked us to create the video as a needed tool for marketing and fundraising. Listening and being open to what the community partner needs is key to this work. While Sean was not a film maker, as a local actor and director he tapped into his network to find the resources that could fulfill Herold's request. At the time, filming the video felt like a distraction

from our work and an additional chore, but I am so glad he did it. While useful for EGH's institutional goals, it was also key to our devising process. In fact, much of our script came from the testimonies captured in the video. As an artist and scholar, I often watch the video when I need inspiration and want to breathe life back into the ephemeral utopian performance I felt during this process.

Propelled by my own experience of utopian performatives during the EGH project, I have continued my work with EGH through my scholarship. *Every Girl's a Hero*, our culminating performance piece, lives on through my relationship with Ruth Herold, the EGH, and the dissemination and application of lessons learned through its creation. The project has been shared and examined through conferences and presentations, such as the Network of Ensemble Theater National Gathering and Symposium in Seattle in June 2017 and at the University of Washington 2020 Three Minute Thesis competition. Our work can be critiqued, examined, and applied by those introduced to it through my article "Every Girl's a Hero: Reevaluating the Ethics of University/Community Partnerships" published in *Theatre Topics* in 2019 and in the publication of this dissertation. *Dialogues on Dignity*, the community-engagement program offered by eSe Teatro, the Latina theatre company to which I belong, will always include a performance and discussion at the EGH. We have become part of a local network that shares values and a utopic vision of a better and more just world.

The People's Temple

The People's Temple is an example of the most well-known form of documentary performance—documentary theatre. In the tradition of *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman), *Fires in the Mirror* (Smith, 1992), and *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* (Smith, 1993), the piece uses verbatim

excerpts from interviews and archival material to trouble the entrenched doxa of the mass murder/suicide at Jonestown. The play, through its process and product, models responsible engagement with traumatic events, the facilitation of deferred conversations to promote community healing, a contribution to Peoples Temple's archive and repertoire, and a utopian approach to art making founded in women of color/Latina feminist thought.

Through performative historiography, the play retells the story of the Temple and its demise through the selecting and arranging of documentary material. Doing so gives credence to a narrative that may disrupt or even contradict what the audience thinks they know about this highly publicized national catastrophe. Indeed, it was these contradictory elements that lured head writer and director, Leigh Fondakowski, into the project. When she and her team used devising and moment work to capture and display these inconsistencies, they were attempting to recreate these moments of discovery for the audience. The 1978 *Newsweek* cover entitled "Special Report: The Cult of Death" may have loomed large in the consciousness of audience, so the writing team and cast chose to combat that trope through joyous live performances of songs from the Peoples Temple's little known gospel album, *He's Able*.

In the play's final scene, actors place clothing on the stage floor to represent dead bodies lying face down, which could allude to the image on the *Newsweek* cover. Then they trouble this image by displaying Temple members' faces on the set and by singing *Walk a Mile in My Shoes*, from *He's Able*. This closing moment is an example of queer curation par excellence. Through the Temple's archive (the words of members and their families), as well as their repertoire (their music), this moment offers the audience an embodied experience of Temple's utopian vision. It was these utopian moments of fellowship, not the tyranny of Jim Jones, that caused so many members to remain until the bitter end.

In addition to utilizing the Temple's archive and repertoire, the play expanded both. While the play itself added to the archive, the process of devising it produced 300 hours of new interviews and several books inspired by, and in some cases generated through, the devising process. The repertoire was expanded by communal dialogue offered in conjunction with the play. Berkeley Rep was intentional about holding community conversations in cities most impacted by the tragedy. Furthermore, as cast member Velina Brown attested, audience members felt free to speak to actors about the show and their connection to these events even outside the theater. These community conversations were deferred by the tragic murders of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk as well as the sensational trial and sentencing of Dan White. Additionally, decades of grief and shame kept families and survivors silent. It took the reputation of the Tony award-winning Berkeley Rep, and the Emmy-nominated Fondakowski, to get people to speak and audiences to listen. While the New York-centric nature of commercial theater may have stunted the circulation of the play, Berkeley Rep's resources and stable subscribership gave them license to facilitate community healing through this work, when other theatres could not. In the words of Berkeley Rep's then Artistic Director, Tony Taccone, "But if not us then who?" (Fondakowski Interview).

Fondakowski's directing style and leadership through the devising process also exemplify the women of color feminist practice of *convivencia*. Through her deliberate convening of a multi-ethnic group of Bay Area artists, including Margo Hall, who lost family friends at Jonestown, she carved out a space for discovery and invention. By spending so much time with Temple family members and survivors, she engaged in *convivencia*. Forging these connections while establishing a safe space for collaborative artistic experimentation set a high standard for the process and the product. The development of the play and its presentation were utopian

gestures because they derive from the notion that people's words and the act of hearing them together can constitute art that illuminates and heals.

Punk Prayer & #Freepussyriot México

Borderlands performance studies takes the lens of performance studies and focuses it on de-colonizing acts or “performatics” or “perform antics.” Studying the Pussy Riot videos and #Freepussyriot México through this lens makes apparent the ideology and aesthetics shared within this feminist activist diaspora. Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* music video and the video of their protest performance in Cathedral of Christ the Saviour displayed images and lyrics (translated into Spanish) that Mexican artists including singers Lucía Escobar Torres, Olinka Gil Amezcua, and Karina Figueroa Lima could recognize. Wearing brightly colored balaclavas inside a stately Cathedral and praying to the Virgin Mary via a punk rock song were Pussy Riot's acts queer curation. Separately, these items/images/sounds might seem incongruous, but, placed side by side, they conveyed a similar message of the need to resist repression and the Latina feminist notion of the Virgin Mary as a feminist protector.

In #Freepussyriot, Mexican artists used documentary performance to respond to this visual and sonic language in their own vernacular. The Russian balaclava became the Mexican Zapatista mask. A cathedral in Moscow became a basilica in Mexico City. Virgin Mary, Mother of God, became Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, The Brown Virgin, or even Tonantzin. Each translation simultaneously recognizes shared as well as distinct qualities, which is a perfect manifestation of the Latina feminist notion of both/and. Instead of erasing one and replacing it with another they are multiplied by their various iterations.

Mexican feminists have several models of women who were both/and. Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz was both a woman of faith and a woman of science. She was both a devout Catholic and a critic of the Church. As a Mexican, a North American, and subject of Spain she produced work written in the languages of all three. Born in San Miguel de Nepantla, she spent her life living in a “land in the middle.” This third space is one Latina feminists know well. In Nepantla, the Virgin Mary is an Indigenous feminist whose protection transcends geopolitical borders.

For the members of the feminist activist diaspora that I am describing, the Internet is also Nepantla. By posting their videos online both Pussy Riot and the makers of #Freepussyriot México tapped into this diaspora. Then when Maria Alyokhina spoke at *La Ciudad de las Ideas* (CDI) the online Nepantla was actualized through her speech, the multiple Mexican Pussy Rioters who joined her on stage, and her visit to the activists of H.I.J.O.S

Documentary performance is a powerful and multifaceted tool. I’ve chronicled its use in critical pedagogy, community-based performance, performative historiography, and queer curation. I have shown that even performances that address homelessness, tragic deaths, and tyranny can become de-colonizing acts that breed utopian performatives. In each case, the words and lived experiences of artists and community members create a fertile ground for these moments that lift us out of an often oppressive and overwhelming present and give us hope.

Trauma, Utopia, and *Convivence* in Documentary Performance

Each of these documentary performances is born of a traumatic event or circumstance. The trauma of homelessness, Jonestown, Pussy Riot’s incarceration, and racism loom large in these works. Yet each generates utopian performatives by employing words and images that spark recognition in audience members, or “the lucid power of intersubjective understanding”

(Performance, Utopia, and the “Utopian Performative,” 479). This recognition builds a sense of being together in community. Being together makes speaking the unspeakable, recovering the lost, or uncovering the unknown bearable because we are not doing it alone. To paraphrase the EGH client who reassured me, we are strong enough to explore these issues because we have our sisters behind us.

In each case artists and activists, or to use the Latina feminist term, *artistas*, cultivate fertile ground for these utopian moments through documentary performance. In the EGH project theater students were inspired by what they heard and witnessed while volunteering at the EGH. They used this documentary material to create a performance piece that made EGH women feel H-S-L, or what Ruth Harold called being “heard, seen, and loved.” The enthusiastic reception of *Every Girl’s a Hero* made these theatre students feel H-S-L. That exchange of love and validation led to my continued involvement with EGH and community-based performance. By devising *The People’s Temple*, artists, survivors, and Temple family members created a more complex understanding of the tragedy which led to deferred community conversations and healing. Witnessing moments of recognition in Pussy Riot’s videos compelled Mexican singers and musicians to record an original song and film a music video as a statement of transnational feminist solidarity. They saw themselves as being in community with Pussy Riot or what I label a feminist activist diaspora. Motivated by local civil rights activism, Dr. Freeman and I developed a small universe of research, art making, and storytelling. These included the *Projects in Dramaturgy* class, the story circle tea, and our sound collages. As auditory tours through the history of the Hilltop neighborhood, the sound collages documented and brought into conversation words and lived experiences of resilience and hope.

The ultimate goal in each of these documentary performances is *convivencia*, or “being present and engaging together in mind, body, and spirit via participatory music and art practice” (Gonzalez 3). Grounding these projects in documentary elements ensures that the process as well as the product is participatory. The artwork cannot be created without documentary material gathered through archival research, interviews, and recordings. Gathering and/or producing these raw materials necessitates time, conversations, observations, and relationship building. Not only is the process unavoidably participatory, but also the product becomes participatory as well. Artists and community members co-create the resulting artwork, albeit with varying levels of creative control. But when done responsibly, community contributors are involved throughout the process, see and critique the final work, and participate in post-show discussions which strengthens the ties of *convivencia*. In many cases the bonds of *convivencia* persist beyond artmaking into activism, community-engagement, and endeavors that manifest pockets of utopia in the here and now.

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