FACILIT*AUTEUR*:
AGENCY, ETHICS, AND FEMINIST IDEOLOGIES IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM

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FACILIT*AUTEUR*: AGENCY, ETHICS, AND FEMINIST IDEOLOGIES IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM

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Directing demands flexibility. Directors must be visionaries who collaborate well; organized administrators who adjust to chaos; and empathetic responders who know when to push actors past their comfort level. Within this demanding discipline, the ways in which a director works with her cast can vary wildly. While most directors are considerate collaborators, dangers arise when one person wields total executive control over a rehearsal room. How are directors ethically prepared to work with actors? How can directors achieve their artistic vision while also creating a space that allows others to explore with safety?

My project, *Facilit*auteur*: Agency, Ethics, and Feminist Ideologies in the Rehearsal Room*, sits at the center of a changing conversation in which practitioners are creating ethical methodologies for working with actors. With discussions of nontraditional director training appearing prominently in journals such as *American Theatre Magazine*, *HowlRound*, and the *Stage Directors and Choreographers (SDC) Society Journal*, directors are being prompted to consider the identity, lived experience, and cultural background of the actor. "Facilit*auteur*" is my term for a director who seeks to create what director Leigh Fondakowski calls "an egalitarian society" within the rehearsal room. Merging the community-based term "facilitator" with a word often used to describe a singular visionary, "auteur," I disrupt and expand on Eurocentric masculinist directing methodologies to create a practical blueprint for approaching directing work from the position of promoting artistic agency.

From 2018-2022, I interviewed over a dozen women directors across theatrical spheres, including professional, educational, and community-based theater. These directors included:

May Adrales, Sarah Chalmers, Tisa Chang, Rachel Chavkin, Liz Diamond, Leigh Fondakowski, Sarah Holdren, Rhodessa Jones, Emily Mann, Leigh Silverman, Lois Weaver, Tamilla Woodard, and Kat Yen. I observed directors in their rehearsal processes and participated in director-led workshops. Together, these facilit*auteurs* have made visible longstanding abuses of power, drawn attention to the lack of gender and racial diversity within the discipline, and are working in the margins to disrupt the traditional hierarchal directing. My dissertation responds to calls for more inclusive directorial pedagogies, with each case study introducing practical directing methodologies that serve to artistically enfranchise actors.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jayme Kilburn is a graduate of the University of California, Santa Barbara with a degree in Dramatic Art and Psychology. In 2014, Jayme completed an interdisciplinary master's degree in Humanities and Social Thought at NYU. She is the Founding Artistic Director of the Strand Theater Company in Baltimore City and was named Artistic Director of Black Hills Community Theatre in Rapid City, South Dakota, in 2021. Jayme is currently an Assistant Professor of Theatre at Union College, Kentucky.

Jayme is an associate member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Union. Her artistic work has received grant funding from the South Dakota Arts Council, Racing Magpie, Cornell Council of the Arts, Baltimore Office of Promotions and the Arts, Maryland State Arts Council, and Artscape. Jayme has directed over thirty plays including *Mr. Burns, a post-electric play* by Anne Washburn at Cornell University. Jayme's full-length plays, *Ding! Or Bye Bye Dad* and *Garbage Kids*, received their world premiere productions at Venus Theatre in 2014 and 2016. Jayme previously worked with the Phoenix Players Theatre Group (founded by incarcerated men) and served on the board of Civic Ensemble, a community-based theater in Ithaca, NY.

Jayme has won three first-year writing seminar awards for her work as an instructor at Cornell University and was part of Cornell's NextGen Professors inaugural cohort. In 2018, Jayme received a $15,000 grant from Engaged Cornell to establish her Women's Performance Workshop as a permanent program in Baltimore City. Jayme was awarded the 2019 Office of Inclusion and Student Engagement (OISE) Community Outreach Award, Cornell University's Provost Diversity Fellowship, and a Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Teaching Assistant Award for the 2019-2020 school year. In March 2019, Jayme co-organized a campus-wide community symposium entitled "Feminist Directions: Performance, Power, and Leadership" which brought together dozens of international, national, and locally-based artists and activists to engage in conversations surrounding artistic practice and power. Jayme's research focuses on feminist performance, specifically as it pertains to women directors.

For my teachers…

David for teaching me presence
Ellen for teaching me scholarship
Bruce for teaching me community
Sara for teaching me how to become myself

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NOTES ON THEATER/RE

One of the first colleagues I met at Union College said, "oh, you're the new theater professor? You know, we've never had a professor here who spells theater right. It's 'er' not 're'." I informed my new colleague that I was indeed an "er" theater person, telling him that I felt it resonated more with my working-class roots.

For some the "er/re" debate comes down to history: theatre with an "re" was passed down from the Latin (theatrum) and Greek (theatron) and is the preferred spelling of our British predecessors. During the American Society for Theatre Research panel, Marvin Carlson's "10,000 Nights: Highlights from 50 Years of Theatre-Going," Carlson, prompted by a question from the audience, definitively stated that "re" is the correct spelling, citing its historical significance.

According to a 1960's article in *Theatre Survey* by Francis Hodge, "theater" is a result of Noah Webster's push in the late 1820s to create an American language purified of English spellings.[1] Nicole Rosky's "What's the Difference Between Theatre and Theater?" in *Broadwayworld.com* states that, for some, theater with an "er" signifies a venue and theatre with an "re" is used to describe the actual performance.[2]

When I opened my theater, the Strand Theater Company in Baltimore City, I had to decide if I would spell theater with an "re" or "er" on the official nonprofit paperwork. At the time, I felt as if "er" was less pretentious and embodied what I hoped the Strand would become: a theater that represented the community. Since then, I have held on to "er" believing "er" to signify American working-class theater (whether it's true or not).

I use theater with an "er" throughout this dissertation with a few major exceptions: when I am quoting someone else who uses "re;" when I am referencing the name of a theater that uses "re;" or when I am referencing a job title that uses "re." To me, using "er" feels like a small way I can keep myself grounded to my scrappy youth when theater was the only thing I ever wanted to do.

[1] Theatre or Theater?, *TheatreinChicago,* www.theatreinchicago.com/news.php?articleID=7

[2] Nicole Rosky, "What's the Difference Between Theatre and Theater?," August 2, 2020, www.broadwayworld.com/article/Theatre-vs-Theater--Whats-the-Difference-20200802

PREFACE

FACILIT*AUTEUR*: AGENCY, ETHICS, AND FEMINIST IDEOLOGIES IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM

Theater saved my life, I truly believe that.[3] – Rhodessa Jones

As I finish this project, I find myself thinking a lot about my complicated relationship with theater. As a child, I loved to perform. I was a ham through and through. I used to dress up and improvise songs for my parents, donning a homemade wig constructed of bathroom towels. I learned from an early age that creating a spectacle allowed me to control the kind of attention I received from others. I wore theatrics like a suit of armor while trying to navigate my mother's alcoholism, my father's mental illness, caretaking for my younger sister, extreme neglect, and scrapes with poverty. In high school, theater was a refuge from the chaos and uncertainty at home. Through theater, I cultivated survival skills: a bubbly personality, a sense of humor, organization, flexibility, creativity, the ability to effectively communicate with others, and confidence. Forged in the fire of trauma, theater would become my life's work.

My anxious attachment to theater meant that my value hinged on the reception of shows I directed. I would describe my directing strategy in early undergrad as: *get compliments on the show*. With this singular mission in mind, I cared very little about *how* I achieved this goal. As an undergrad, I learned how to secure rights for a production, break down my script into French scenes[4], craft minimalist designs, create an appealing stage picture (hint: avoid actors in a line and use levels), and the mechanics of scene transitions. I loved creatively problem-solving and being in charge of a room. I learned to work with actors by observing directing demonstrations and by the pedagogical mainstay of theater: *doing*.

[3] Rhodessa Jones, interview by author, March 12, 2019.
[4] A French scene begins when a character enters or exits the scene.

In the early 2000s, there wasn't language around the idea of a trauma-informed rehearsal room. For the most part, production over process was an absolutely acceptable (and potentially encouraged) approach. Perhaps even more alarmingly, I often heard seasoned directors talk about "breaking" their actors. As someone who desperately wanted a successful directing career, I took these lessons to heart and began cultivating a directorial approach that put the needs of the production above all else. I was known by some as the "actor whisperer." Looking back, I did not so much whisper as methodically and forcefully demand a "good" performance through any means necessary. I devised improvisational exercises to elicit authentic emotional responses from actors, telling them to "use it in the scene." Combining a lethal mix of the Method and Meisner, I had actors repeat one line over and over again until they found the perfect cadence. After pulling a personal traumatic story out of an actor who was clearly resisting, I told the actor I wanted him to "spread his pain all over the stage."

At the time, pushing actors into uncomfortable (and sometimes unsafe) terrain was the sign of a good director. During an acting class in college, my instructor had me yell one line at my scene partner until he decided the scream felt "real." I did this for the entire class period – over an hour – while my peers watched in silence. By the end of the class, I screamed. A real, genuine scream. My instructor was elated and from then on, I was his favorite student. Over twenty years later, I can elicit a realistic, ear-drumming, diaphragm-supported scream on command. I was one of those people who repeated the mantra, *if I survived it, so can you*. From that experience I learned that breaking people can be effective. Being broken and breaking others was, simply put, the price of admission for a life in the theater.

The way I directed was also informed by being a woman in a position of power. In my early years as a director, I encountered numerous (mostly male) actors, production staff, and

producers who simply did not respect me. When I was 28 years old, I was given the opportunity to start a theater. I thought that perhaps being in charge of a space would lend me some gravitas. Instead, I continued to be put in a position of having to prove myself over and over and over again.

As a leader in rehearsal rooms, I have had to constantly figure out how to wield power in a way that is neither weak nor threatening. I have stayed in bad working environments and retained misogynist actors because sometimes it was just easier to grin and bear it for the sake of the production. Now, as a forty-something almost-PhD with years of directing experience, I have the language to discuss structural inequality but am still surprised when I encounter someone who exhibits sexist behavior. I never get used to it.

I was first (properly) exposed to feminist performance in graduate school at New York University. In 2013, the Hemispheric Institute in New York City mounted an archival exhibit and invited two of their most renowned living archives to perform: Split Britches. Although I had studied Split Britches a bit, seeing Peggy Shaw and Los Weaver[5] live broke my worldview open. These bold, daring, informed, lesbian-feminist women made their own rules when it came to theater. They were non-hierarchal, community-oriented, and seemingly uninterested in commercial success. They provided a process-based template for creating theater that upended masculinist ideologies regarding creative power. It was mind-blowing. Not only did Split Britches queer classic texts I had been taught to revere (and somewhat fear), they brazenly wrote

[5] Split Britches was founded in 1980 by Deb Margolin, Peggy Shaw, and Lois Weaver. Split Britches was the driving force behind the famed WOW Café – a producing house for women and queer artists. Since its inception, Split Britches has written and performed plays that focus on working-class and working-poor lesbian identity. Split Britches is best known for their queer adaptations of classic plays (such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*) along with their innovative use of theatrical forms. Books about Split Britches include: *The Only Way Home Is Through the Show: Performance Work of Lois Weaver* (2015) edited by Jen Harvie and Lois Weaver; *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw* (2011) edited by Jill Dolan; and, *Split Britches Lesbian Practice/Feminist Performance* (1996) edited By Sue-Ellen Case.

and collaboratively directed their own scripts. Instead of hiding behind realistic scenery and costumes, they sought to make visible their artistic labor through handcrafted props and well-worn set pieces. They solicited audience participation, taking on the precarious task of welcoming the spectator into the production to help shape the material as it was being presented.

From feminist performance, I easily transitioned into community-based theater.[6] Upon entering the Performing and Media Arts doctoral program at Cornell, I stumbled upon Civic Ensemble, a community-based theater in Ithaca. My first (of many) projects with Civic was as a playwright. I sat in on the devising process of their community-based play, *Home, A Living Newspaper*. I observed as the play's participants improvised scenes about the housing crisis in Ithaca. Then, I took my notes home and crafted them into a script. Community-based theater offered the opportunity to work directly with community members, creating a participant-centered performance. Instead of searching for a published play that communicated an important issue, participants could speak directly to spectators about their own experiences using theater as a vehicle of empowerment.

In my third year at Cornell, I developed the Women's Performance Workshop (WPW). The first iteration was part of a theater laboratory for graduate students. The WPW merged feminist theater-making ideologies with community-based practices. Over the course of six months, the participants wrote and (collaboratively) directed personal narratives using feminist pedagogies, Boal methodologies, and Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process. It was through projects like the WPW that I began to interrogate the role of the director. Within participant-

[6] The term "community-based" encompasses a wide range of participant-based theater. Designated under the umbrella of "applied theater," community-based theater often takes the form of working directly with communities to identify an important social, cultural, or political issue and creates a performance based on the input of the community itself. Often community-based theater involves "participant-actors" who inform the content of the play/performance through their own personal narratives/creative input. See for example the work of Cornerstone Theater Company and Roadside Theater.

based theater, the designation “director” felt too authoritative. Instead, I opted to be called a “facilitator” in an effort to decenter my position of power in the room.

Being a facilitator helped me realize that I did not have to wield power in the room through masculinist authority-making. Not only could I defer to members of the group (in other words, I did not need to have all the answers), within the context of facilitation, this was *encouraged*. I did not always agree with the material or aesthetics the participants produced, but the work was authentically their own. Instead of capitalizing on actor trauma, we created a space of healing. And ultimately, the success of these projects was measured in participant engagement.

This is where my dissertation project begins: at the intersection of conventional directing methodologies and inclusive, equitable, and ethical practices based on feminist ideologies. In an effort to make these intersections more visible, I have coined the term facilit*auteur* (facilitator + auteur). Although one might view this project as an indictment of traditional directing methodologies, it is actually a love letter to a discipline that has given me so much. What I treasure about theater is its ability to endure, adapt, and respond to the world around it. It revels in tragic injustices and imagines utopian possibilities.

*Facilit*auteur*: Agency, Ethics, and Feminist Ideologies in the Rehearsal Room* examines the practices of theater directors who thoughtfully consider the agency of the actor. Leading through their individualized feminist/womanist lens, the directors I have selected for inclusion in this project are directorial mixologists, fusing and blending historically masculinist auteur directing methodologies with a praxis informed by their own particular feminist/womanist ideologies. Through this unique combination of masculinist and feminist practices, these directors have effectively shifted how creative leadership is practiced in their rehearsal spaces.

Facilitauteur posits that women directors, such as the ones mentioned in this project, have developed methodologies that might provide a blueprint for threading the needle between production needs and developing a rehearsal room that honors the agency and identities of the actor. Instead of viewing actors as a blank vessel that a character inhabits, these directors regard the actor as full collaborators in the process. Additionally, they recognize that in order to embody a character, actors must often grapple with their own identities, ideologies, and lived experiences with the world. As an actor, bringing one's full self to the work means sometimes using one's own lived experience and sometimes subverting it. In both cases, there is a kind of sensitivity, understanding, and engagement needed by the director to facilitate this extremely precarious process.

Trauma is mercurial. It can be triggered by a gesture, a look, or a negation of one's ideas and identity. *Facilitauteur* seeks to hone in on trauma-informed practices, including engaging with empathy and vulnerability and creating flexible boundaries in the rehearsal room. Additionally, it builds off of techniques developed by directors who engage with difference as part of the mission of their artistic work. In directing cross-culturally and interculturally, these directors have cultivated methodologies that resist a hegemonic whitewashing of culturally-specific material. These methods not only demand that directors decenter their own cultural lens but foster an environment of cooperative artistic leadership.

This project is a declaration of the importance of directorial rigor, not necessarily by educational training alone. I do not want to declass the "learning by doing" training model of directing. In fact, my chapter on Rhodessa Jones is focused on how important those pathways are. At the same time, authority is a responsibility. When the product is put over process, directors have the capacity to do real harm. In an industry with little to no oversight, "artistic

vision" and "artistic integrity" are catch-all phrases that can give directors permission to achieve their vision at any cost.

Facilitauteur takes a collaborative approach to directing scholarship. In developing a language for the underarticulated methods of the women directors I observed, I draw from multiple theatrical perspectives (including theories on acting and dramaturgy), as well as ethnography, affect studies, and cognitive science. It is my sincere hope that the scholarship included informs and expands theories on directing. As a practitioner, it can sometimes be difficult for me to explain a specific directing choice in the moment. There is a certain amount of "feeling it out" that happens in the rehearsal room that I find hard to articulate. Yet, it is for this exact reason this project exists. Only when I acknowledge that my intuition is informed by my experiences and specific identity-markers can I begin to understand how to balance and untangle my positionality from my artistic instincts.

Finally, this project insinuates that ethical directing methodologies reverberate throughout the entire process – meaning that artistic agency can actually make the production *better*. When artistic collaborators have autonomy, they simply bring their best to the table.

Over the last four years, I have had the profound privilege of speaking with and observing women directors at the top of their game. These powerful women – May Adrales, Sarah Chalmers, Tisa Chang, Rachel Chavkin, Liz Diamond, Leigh Fondakowski, Sarah Holdren, Rhodessa Jones, Emily Mann, Leigh Silverman, Lois Weaver, Tamilla Woodard, and Kat Yen – represent directors from a wide spectrum of training, methodologies, and institutional investments.

Some of these women are freelance directors working at top-tier institutions (Leigh Silverman, Rachel Chavkin, and May Adrales, for example). Some have carved out their own

unique spaces within America's theatrical landscape (Rhodessa Jones, Sarah Holdren, and Sarah Chalmers, for example). Some are artistic directors, shaping their own organization's vision (Tisa Chang, Liz Diamond, and Emily Mann, for example). And some oscillate between multiple theatrical spaces (Tamilla Woodard, Lois Weaver, Kat Yen, and Leigh Fondakowski, for example). Despite working in differing types of theatrical institutions (or no institution at all), these women have developed a directing praxis fundamentally built on the values of equity, inclusivity, and collaboration.

As someone who has directed within a variety of theatrical forms and spaces (community, professional, educational, and applied theater), I see a profound absence of scholarship that articulates the ways in which these differing theatrical communities inform each other. In other words, I use community-based methodologies in professional theatrical spheres and vice versa – it makes me a better director. Through my observations of these directors, it is my firm belief that because the directing discipline is so slippery and because directors cut their teeth in a variety of spaces, the discipline itself is already informed by this cross-disciplinary approach. The scholarship has simply not caught up to the practice. Yet…

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INTRODUCTION

Buy-in from the artists who are working for you, whether they're in your company or in your show, is the most important thing for the success of a show. Everybody having extreme ownership. I don't have to be the expert. I should be the one asking the most questions.[7]
– Tamilla Woodard

I think for me, real collaboration, it does not mean a lot of people sitting around constantly saying yes to every idea, and being uncritical. It actually means strong propositions and strong counter propositions.[8] – Sara Holdren

In March 2019, I co-organized a symposium titled Feminist Directions: Performance, Power, and Leadership with Cornell University's Department of Performing and Media Arts where I completed my doctoral work. The symposium was informed by my dissertation, which, as you will read, is written through the lens of women stage directors. As one of the largest conferences in the department's history, it brought together internationally, nationally, and locally recognized scholars, artists, and activists to discuss intersections between performance praxis and feminist ideologies. In raising over $17,000 for the event, some intense networking by my committee chair, and sheer scheduling luck, we assembled what I can only describe as a dream team of women directors who practice across the United States in a range of theatrical forms.

The symposium weekend included: a masterclass with Pan Asian Repertory Theatre Founding Artistic Director, Tisa Chang; a Long Table forum facilitated by Split Britches co-founders Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw; a community-based workshop led by The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women's Founder and Artistic Director, Rhodessa Jones; and a "Bad and Nasty" Cabaret kick-off event featuring an incredible line-up of visiting artists and

[7] Tamilla Woodard, author interview, February 18, 2018.
[8] Sarah Holdren, author interview, November 25, 2018.

local talent, including performance artist Holly Hughes, one of the famed NEA Four.[9] Perhaps, though, the most fruitful event for my purposes was the titular discussion with six prominent women theater makers about gender, feminism, and, of course, directing. I prepared several questions for the guests but ultimately opened with one that continues to haunt this project: what does a director *do*, exactly?

In response to the question there was a bit of laughter and knowing looks from the panel. Rhodessa Jones answered first, describing how she approached directing incarcerated participants "…I took what little I knew as an actress from traditional theater. And first of all, I just wanted to make sure everybody would stand up straight and speak loudly and not run into the furniture."[10] Jones went on to declare that "casting was everything" and that she preferred actors who were "loud and bawdy." Tectonic Theater's Leigh Fondakowski told the group that as a devising director her "actors taught her how to direct"[11] and Lois Weaver said she "rarely thinks of herself as a director" instead positioning herself as an "inside eye."[12] Sue Perlgut, co-founder in 1970 of one of the first women's theater collectives in the United States, It's Alright to Be Woman Theatre, insisted that her directing "…is innate, really. It all comes from inside" and emphasized that "I really do let the actors speak, that's really, really important to me."[13] And finally, Tisa Chang described herself as a "master artistic orchestrator" and said that "in the

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[9] The NEA Four (Karen Finley, John Fleck, Holly Hughes, and Tim Miller) are performance artists who were originally granted NEA awards only to have them revoked by congressman and NEA Chair John E. Frohnmeyer in 1990 after congress passed a "decency clause" restricting government funding to artists who produce art that might be seen as "obscene." The four artists sued the government with their case ultimately working its way to the Supreme Court in 1998. The Supreme Court ruled that the government's decency clause does not interfere with artist's first amendment rights. As a result, the NEA did away with individual grants altogether. Cited: Author Unknown, "The N.E.A. Four: Life After Symbolhood" *New York Times*, June 5, 1994.

[10] Rhodessa Jones, "Feminist Directions," roundtable, Department of Performing and Media Arts, Cornell University, May 16, 2019.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

actual room, what is important to me is that I create a world of harmony, of peace, of respect, mutual respect."[14] Although each director responded slightly differently to the prompt, there was an overarching notion that they all served as what Weaver calls "maker/facilitators," seeking to create a room that Fondakowski calls an "egalitarian society."

This "egalitarian" society that Chang, Fondakowski, Jones, Perlgut, and Weaver all gesture towards is counterintuitive to the way I was taught directing, which tended to emphasize the director as a solitary visionary. Instead, these directors imagined a more utopian structure, one in which hierarchy yields to collectivity. Rachel Chavkin, who won a Tony Award for Best Director in 2019 for *Hadestown,* insists that "the culture that you create in the room will inevitably embed itself in the work."[15] According to this logic, a difficult rehearsal process – one in which actors are oppressed – will manifest itself in lackluster performances. The rehearsal space is where the performance is assembled, investigated, and refined. And, where actors are asked to affectively embody identities and personas outside of themselves. Creating a space where actors can confidently tackle difficult material demands putting a great deal of emphasis on personal interactions.

Directing, perhaps, already has a methodology for these types of egalitarian imaginings, namely collaboration. At the same time, methodologies behind collaboration remain elusive (like directing itself). I spoke to several directors for this project, ultimately deciding to highlight the work of Leigh Silverman, Rhodessa Jones, Tisa Chang, and Liz Diamond who represent a spectrum of directors practicing across methods and forms, who care very much about uplifting women's voices through/within theater, and who have carved out notable careers despite the systemic barriers that exist for women directors. Through subject rehearsal observations,

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Rachel Chavkin, "Devising within a Democracy Workshop," ART/NY's Spaces, December 13, 2018.

interviews, and workshops, I charted what I saw the directors doing (their methods) and the meaning-making behind these methods (theories), coming to the conclusion that collaboration stood at the center of each of their techniques. In trying to untangle the stakes of the collaborative process, I drew on cross-disciplinary theoretical materials surrounding cognition, affect, feminist theories, communication, critical race theory, performance studies, and ethnographies, drawing parallels between what I observed and the theories that could explain their broader implications.

The directors I spoke to for this project indicated that collaboration is a balance between having a strong artistic vision and fostering an atmosphere of artistic agency. Instead of one person being the solitary visionary, director and critic Sara Holdren prefers collaboration and making space for several strong artistic propositions.

> It means that I, as a director, with a coherent and hopefully compelling vision that I have communicated clearly, that I bring strong propositions into the room, and that I try to foster a room in which actors or designers or other collaborators feel like they can meet those with their own strong propositions. They feel like they can say either literally verbally or just through an idea that they have in the moment, and decide to investigate, feel that they can say, "Yes, and," or "No, what about this?"[16]

Emily Mann, who served as the Artistic Director of the McCarter Theatre Center from 1990-2020, describes the director's artistic vision as heightening the skillsets in the room, tying the production together into the most clear and vibrant version it can be "…the director is the one who keeps it all together, and is responsible for rendering the most clear, beautiful, and brilliantly executed production of whatever the piece is…"[17] In order to achieve a brilliantly executed production, Mann solicits feedback from everyone in the room, saying "I don't care

[16] Sarah Holdren, author interview, November 25, 2018.
[17] Emily Mann, author interview, February 25, 2019.

whether it's from the lowliest observer intern in the room, or whether it's from the leading lady who's won two Oscars. I mean, a good idea is a good idea."[18]

In recognition of there being a symbiotic relationship between having a strong artistic vision and collaborating with others, I have developed the term facilit*auteur*. The root of facilit*auteur* (facilitator) comes from community-based theater whose methodologies focus almost exclusively on the primacy of the actor and what Jan Cohen-Cruz describes as "art driven by personal connection to the material and a need to communicate [it]."[19] Many community-based practitioners draw on the pedagogy of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal[20] who call for a dialogic method of education, whereby everyone is a subject. Instead of the process exclusively serving the performance, community-based theater is frequently more interested in what is produced from the *experience* of creating work, thereby shifting its measure of success from a product-based model to one that focuses on changemaking in communities and individuals. In *Local Acts: Community Based Performance in the United States* (2005), Jan Cohen-Cruz says "In mainstream theater it doesn't matter how horrible the rehearsals are if the critics deem the show a success; such a measuring stick does not fly in this field, which is equally for participants as for spectators."[21] In short, the methodologies employed in creating the work are just as important as the work itself.

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 109.
[20] Brazilian theorist and educator, Paulo Freire, wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), a seminal text on how to de-colonize education. Influenced by Freire, Brazilian theater practitioner, Augusto Boal, wrote *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974). *Theatre of the Oppressed* are techniques developed by Boal during his time working at Arena Theatre of São Paulo. The techniques focus on theatrical exercises that promote theater as a vehicle for social and political discussions.
[21] Cohen-Cruz, 109.

In the 2022 *New York Times* article, "Is It Finally Twilight for the Theater's Sacred Monsters?" Jesse Green chronicles long-standing abuses perpetrated by the founders of American theater. Lee Strasberg, for example, founder of the Group Theater in 1931 and Artistic Director of the Actors Studio from 1951 until his death in 1982, did much to popularize his version of Stanislavski's "System," which he called "the Method," in America. He also tended to verbally attack actors (primarily women) during rehearsals.[22] One of Strasberg's students, Elia Kazan, a prolific film and stage director, has been quoted as saying that bedding young hopefuls is a "totally natural extension of the director-actress relationship."[23] While Green ultimately disapproves of the behavior of American theater founders, he also asks what American theater loses if they did not exist, questioning what theater would look like if actors were not "pushed to their limits." While Green questions what American theater might have lost without these seminal auteurs, he asserts that these "sacred monsters" imbued aspects of the discipline with gender-based violence, emotional cruelty, and white supremacy.

Although it is an interesting thought project to imagine how theater might have evolved differently had it not been for these men, this project is interested in what is happening within the discipline *now*. Green says, "more than ever, practitioners and critics are asking difficult questions about how we make actors, how we make plays, how we make seasons, how we make money — in short, how we make theater."[24] In my view, community-based theater's methodologies have answers to some of these questions, especially as they pertain to "how we make actors." Community-based theater has historically measured its success differently than the

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[22] Jesse Green, "Is It Finally Twilight for the Theater's Sacred Monsters?" *New York Times*, August 1, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/08/theater/men-american-theater.html. See, also, Rosemary Malague, *An Actress Prepares.*
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

strict capitalistic concerns of commercial theater. As Cohen-Cruz asserts, community-based theater is largely concerned with the agency of its participants. If this measuring stick is applied to commercial theater, then borrowing from community-based methodologies for working with actors may give insight into where shifts in directing methodologies urgently need to take place.

In juxtaposing "facilitator" and "auteur" I provoke a reimaging of the auteur, concluding that executing a strong artistic vision can exist in equal standing with inclusive, ethical, and collaborative methodologies of creating theater. Within a collaborative directorial framework, the term acknowledges the duality and tension between artistic vision (auteur) and fostering a culture of inclusion and collaboration (facilitator). It also acknowledges that directors have biases (cultural or otherwise) that can be propagated during the rehearsal process.

Over thirty years ago, *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter* (1993), edited by Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement, presented a similar provocation, suggesting that directors have biases (as all people do) and that it is inevitable that those biases will ultimately embed themselves in the production. As they note, "A director's personal style is one element among many in the complex system called mode of production, which sees to it that whatever is produced ultimately reproduces 'dominant ideology.' The way we direct is part of that system, and we need therefore to become conscious of our own process."[25]

Upstaging Big Daddy opened the door for other books dedicated to exploring the ways in which one's personal lens informs one's directing praxis. From approximately 2000-2010, there was a slight surge in literature dedicated to making visible the experiences of "women directors," namely Rebecca Daniel's *Women Stage Directors Speak: Exploring the Influence of Gender on*

[25] Ellen Donkin, "Black Text, White Director: Issues of Race and Gender in Directing African American Drama," in *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter*, eds. Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement (University of Michigan Press, 1993), 81.

Their Work (2000), Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins' *Women in American Theatre* (3rd ed. 2006), and Anne L. Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow's *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century* (2008). In addition, *Upstaging Big Daddy* paved the way for women directors to write their own directing narratives – see the extensive writings produced by Anne Bogart and Katie Mitchell in this time period. During this time, however, the ideals of directing did not shift dramatically. Instead, many women directors sought to prove that they were just as capable of directing in a masculinist mode as their male counterparts, distancing themselves from what was seen as feminist (collaborative) methodologies. Instead, in the early 2010s, women theater makers were primarily focused on parity within hiring practices, as seen in reports such as the League of Professional Theatre Women's "Women Count: Women Hired Off-Broadway 2010-2015." Finally, in conjunction with the rise in theater artists publicly expressing the need for culturally competent and trauma-informed practices, women directors began to more largely discuss how their gender identity did, in fact, inform their directing methodologies.

I use the term facilit*auteur* as a guidepost to propose new praxes regarding directing based on facilitation models that emphasize egalitarian processes. At the same time, I endeavor to disentangle authoritarian practices from having a strong directorial vision. And, going even further, I offer that, as Holdren argues, "real collaboration is actually not mutually exclusive with having a very strong leader with a really defined, powerful vision."[26]

The Facilit*auteur*: Stakes

> *I think compromise can often be the death of theater…instead, it is a collaboration. You have to have a shared vision and be able to communicate that seamlessly to your whole team.*[27]
> – May Adrales

[26] Sarah Holdren, interview by author, November 25, 2018.
[27] May Adrales, interview by author, April 15, 2018.

In *Collaborative Stage Directing: A Guide to Creating and Managing a Positive Theatre Environment* (2019), Jean Burgess emphasizes communication as a central tenant of collaboration, asking "what place leadership and mutual respect have in the theatre"?[28] Burgess identifies "active skills" that involve collaboration including: "coordinating, delegating, guiding, advising, empowering, participating, and managing."[29] In *Collaboration in Theatre: A Practical Guide for Designers and Directors* (2016), Rob Roznowski and Kirk Domer provide a practical blueprint for collaboration that includes demonstrating the ways in which miscommunications can easily occur between directors and designers who have strong artistic visions. Roznowski and Domer suggest that establishing a clear "chain of command" is an important aspect of collaboration, emphasizing a hierarchy that includes checks and balances to directorial power. Thus, allowing "ideas [to] flow freely from one collaborator to the next with the production serving as the hub"[30] with respect and positive communication listed as vital attributes. Both *Collaborative Stage Directing* and *Collaboration in Theatre* offer valuable practical methodologies for collaborating while acknowledging that directing is a situational discipline and, despite preparation, there will always be elements of the craft that require being reactive in the moment. However, one can improve their ability to react compassionately through setting up best practices for communicating with other artists.

Learning how to ethically, competently, and effectively work with other artists has tangible and important stakes within the directing discipline beyond individual directors and rehearsal processes. In her book, *Teaching Theatre Today: Pedagogical Views of Theatre in*

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[28] Jean Burgess, *Collaborative Stage Directing: A Guide to Creating and Managing a Positive Theatre Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2019), xiii.
[29] Ibid., 4.
[30] Rob Roznowski and Kirk Domer, *Collaboration in Theatre: A Practical Guide for Designer and Directors* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 9.

Higher Education (2004), Anne Fliotsos asserts that "Regardless of the country, at least in the West, the stage director is recognized as the central figure in theatre."[31] In the summer 2015 edition of the *SDC Journal* (Stage Director and Choreographers Society), a newly established peer-reviewed section of the periodical identified that over 1/3 of SDC members "are working as teachers and/or artists in institutions of higher education."[32] Not only are directors responsible for dictating the culture of whatever rehearsal room they are in, sometimes serving as artistic directors shaping the artistic culture of an entire institution, they are also largely responsible for teaching both acting and directing within the academy, making their pedagogical reach significant.

Directors cultivate a process primarily by doing. Fliotsos surveyed nine directing teachers whose teaching experience spanned several decades. Most notably, amongst directors with M.F.A.s and professional directing experience, teachers were far less likely to use directing textbooks and agreed that the only way a student can learn to direct is by doing the job of directing. Directing teachers also cited that the most influential aspect of their own directing pedagogy was the personal relationships they had with their teachers,[33] which is to say that the best practices of any one director will likely be replicated by their students. The danger of learning by doing within a discipline with very little oversight, and that measures the success of a project primarily through the end result (production), is that the techniques directors employ to get a desired result from an actor might not necessarily be ethical or even safe and will likely be perpetuated by other artists who observe these practices.

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[31] Anne L. Fliotsos and Gail Medford, *Teaching Theatre Today: Pedagogical Views of Theatre in Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 65.
[32] Anne L. Fliotsos and Ann M. Shanahan, "Directing and Choreography in the Academy and the Profession: a Forum," *SDC Journal* (Summer 2015), 38.
[33] Fliotsos and Medford, *Teaching Theatre Today*, 72.

As an undergraduate director studying the Method, I reveled in "breaking" actors of what I perceived to be bad habits, once demanding that an actor repeat one line over and over again in front of the cast to "help" rid him of a fake British accent. During a different production, I devised an exercise wherein an actor tried to get the attention of the cast, which was instructed to ignore him. The actor screamed at the other actors, pleading that they look at him, eventually ending up in tears. While this exercise was devised to manufacture a sense of desperate invisibility, I executed the exercise without consulting with the actor, and having no idea if it would trigger any past traumas. Instead of asking his permission to initiate the exercise, giving him the agency to participate or not (or at least discuss any tension he may be feeling) I led the exercise without informing the actor of the parameters, the intention, or giving him permission to stop it. While many argue that the actor's job by necessity is to embody the character's trauma, or as director Nadia Fall asserts in in *Contemporary Women Stages Directors*, "…actors have to show vulnerability and inhabit painful spaces,"[34] it is irresponsible and sometimes dangerous when the show-as-product is prioritized over the rehearsal process. This is compounded by an artistic hierarchy that often does not recognize the agency of the actor. As director Kimberley Senior notes, "Actors are the most disempowered people in our field and it breaks my heart,"[35] while Amy Steiger writes, "Have American actors ever been represented in textbooks as intellectuals, dissenters, or agents of change?"[36]

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[34] Paulette Marty, *Contemporary Women Stage Directors: Conversations on Craft* (London: Methuen Drama, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 133.
[35] Ibid., 142.
[36] Amy Steiger, "Whiteness, Patriarchy, and Resistance in Actor Training Texts: Reframing Acting Students as Embodied Critical Thinkers," *HowlRound,* August 13, 2019.

In 2016, a *Chicago Reader* article exposed the abuse that had been occurring at a Chicago storefront theater, Profiles Theatre, for over twenty years.[37] One of the theater's leaders, Darrell Cox, with the complicity of several other company members, had been abusing actors under the guise of producing artistically sound productions. A former actor, using only her first name "Sara," stated that "with a few exceptions, he would systematically break people and critique them to the point that it was hard to even do any acting onstage, because after every show, he would let you know all the things that you did that were horrible and how you were a terrible, terrible actor and person."[38] This article spurred a movement, #NotInOurHouse, to make visible hidden abuses and actor exploitations primarily affecting women occurring in non-equity theaters. An excerpt of the #NotInOurHouse Statement of Principle reads:

> Obviously, both women and men can be subjected to abusive conduct, but the reality is that those who behave abusively are generally in positions of power. Artistic directors hold the power to employ, playwrights have hiring approval; removing a director mid-rehearsal puts an entire production in doubt; losing a celebrity from the cast hurts ticket sales. All of these roles continue to be predominantly held by men and their victims predominantly women. An unresolved conflict with a person in power can easily become an ongoing barrier to career opportunities throughout a woman's career. Harassment and abuse are contributing factors that slow the advancement of women in theater.[39]

With the #MeToo movement[40], staff and performers who work in larger theaters, such as Houston's Alley Theatre and New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre, came forward citing instances of sexual harassment.[41] Director May Adrales, who interned at Long Wharf Theatre when

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[37] Aimee Levitt and Christopher Piatt, "At Profiles Theatre the drama—and abuse—is real," *Chicago Reader,* June 8, 2016.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Chicago Theatre Standards, December 2017, https://notinourhouseorg.wordpress.com/
[40] The #MeToo movement was founded by Tarana Burke, an American activist in 2006. A decade later, in 2017, Alyssa Milano used the hashtag #MeToo in a tweet exposing abuses by filmmaker, Harvey Weinstein. The hashtag went viral and subsequently started a visible movement surrounding sexual harassment and abuse (https://metoomvmt.org/)
[41] Susan Carroll, Wei-Huan Chen, and Molly Glentzer, "Actors describe toxic, bullying atmosphere during Alley productions," *Houston Chronicle,* January 12, 2018.

Gordon Edelstein served as Artistic Director, said that it was an open secret that Edelstein harassed women.

> I was there as an intern and it was my first time in a professional setting, period. People on senior staff would say to me, and members of the board, they were just like, "Oh, you should just stay away from Gordon." I was a young woman, and I remember hearing that and then not challenging it…" Being kind of a dumb 21-year-old or 22-year-old, I was just like, "Oh, this is just how it is. This is just how you deal. If he's the Artistic Director, and he's the leader."[42]

Although these examples serve as extreme cases of unethical behavior, they speak to a larger issue in the discipline that serves to perpetuate the director's artistic supremacy and encourages the director to achieve their vision at any cost.

The recent explosion of calls for antiracism within the institution demands that directors take a hard look at the ways in which their artistic lens promotes white supremacy. Bias within theater manifests in several ways, the most visible perhaps being through racist casting policies. In 2015, a Clarion University production of *Jesus in India* was canceled when playwright Lloyd Suh voiced concerns that the titular character, Jesus, (who is specifically described as South Asian) would be played by a white student.[43] In August 2021, local director, John R. Lewis, criticized the San Jose Playhouse for its all-white casting of *Into the Woods,* calling the show online: "Into the White People Only Woods."[44] Shannon Guggenheim, the theater's co-producer, blamed the casting choice on a business decision. San Jose Playhouse's previous show, *MeshugaNutcracker!,* described by Guggenheim as a "period piece," was cast with white Ashkenazi Jews before it was cancelled due to COVID. As an act of "loyalty" she cast 8 of the 10 *Into the Woods* roles with those previously cast actors. *Into the Woods* was later canceled

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[42] May Adrales, interview by author, April 15, 2018.
[43] Lloyd Suh, "University Cancels Production of Jesus in India After Playwright Voices Concern Over Casting of White Actors," *Playbill*, November 15, 2015.
[44] Janiak, Lily. "'Into the White People Only Woods': A Bay Area theater company is getting slammed for casting, then canceling, all-white show," *San Francisco Chronicle,* September 29, 2021.

after the backlash, with several actors of color coming forward to say they had auditioned for the production, noting that the producers had other casting options. In reflecting on the situation, Guggenheim said "…we do thoroughly understand," and added, "it can't just be [about] business anymore."[45]

More insidious examples of white supremacy stem from a white lens that privileges "human experiences" that tend to neutralize specific cultural content. In "Playwrights of Color, White Directors, and Exposing Racist Policy," Nicole Brewer cites a theatergoer who "mentioned the pervasiveness of how rapidly a production can go from being a play about a specific racial/ethnic group to one about the 'human experience' when white directors justify their leadership and involvement in the process."[46] Besides neutralizing race in any given production, this bias creates a circumstance in which white directors stage plays by authors of color without considering the relationship between the audience and the work. In recounting James Ijames' *Kill Move Paradise,* a play that centers on Black male trauma, Brewer describes a theatergoer as saying "I felt like my identity, fears, and pain were on display for a predominantly white audience."[47]

Kaja Dunn, acting professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, argues that authoritarian practices are antithetical to inclusivity and to the efforts of artists striving to decolonize the rehearsal room. Dunn believes that the more agency an actor has, the less potential there is for the types of biases outlined above. To this end, Dunn advocates for an acting and directing system based on "flexibility" rather than "neutrality."

> What I found is that in this idea of teaching neutral often actors were so torn down they couldn't identify their own truths. When I went through school a lot of the philosophy was tear you down to build you up…technique is a tool, so how do we find things that

[45] Ibid.
[46] Nicole Brewer, "Playwrights of Color, White Directors, and Exposing Racist Policy," *HowlRound,* August 29, 2019.
[47] Ibid.

> work for you as an actor and instead of tearing you down to build you up we start with who you are and what asset that brings and then we make you flexible.[48]

Dunn argues that neutrality is often code for "white" and advocates for inclusive teaching/directing practices that are informed by the unique perspectives' actors bring to the rehearsal room. Dunn's practice focuses on decolonizing theater, a process that involves agitating power structures and creating an inclusive environment for actors to work in.

Similarly, *The Politics of American Actor Training* (2010) edited by Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud, compiles essays by "thirteen prominent academics and artists [to] view actor training through a political, cultural, and ethical lens…to tackle fraught topics about power as it plays out in American curricula and classrooms…"[49] focusing heavily on how educators can help actors maintain their identity, offer access to differently abled actors, and encourage diversity within the field. The anthology *Casting a Movement* (2019) concentrates on casting practices, citing Judith Butler in explicating that theater's lack of diversity continues "hegemonic norms"[50] "on both societal and theatrical stages"[51] whereby identities and hence beliefs are produced.[52] In director Daniel Banks' afterward to the book, he nods toward Black Lives Matter and the #MeToo Movement as a reckoning for "rampant discriminatory, abusive, and illegal behaviors."[53] As he notes, artists (anyone, really) who exhibits this behavior do so as a

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[48] Kaja Dunn, "Decolonizing Theatre," UNC Charlotte College of Art and Architecture, https://coaa.charlotte.edu/video-library/kaja-dunn-decolonizing-theatre.
[49] Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud, eds.*, The Politics of American Actor Training* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 2.
[50] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), in *Casting a Movement: The Welcome Table Initiative,* eds. Claire Syler and Daniel Banks (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 14.
[51] Daniel Banks, "The Welcome Table: Casting for an Integrated Society," in *Casting a Movement: The Welcome Table Initiative*, eds. Claire Syler and Daniel Banks (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 14.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Daniel Banks, "Afterword," in *Casting a Movement: The Welcome Table Initiative*, eds. Claire Syler and Daniel Banks (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 228.

"manifestation of such systemic bias, discrimination, and abuses of power that they (perhaps more quietly now) still ask, 'What's the big deal?'"[54]

Resistance to unethical, coercive theater practices has also propelled the recent advent of intimacy directors, working with actors to safely enact scenes that require involved physical touch (usually sexual) based on pillars of consent, communication, and explicit choreography. In "Meet The 'Intimacy Directors' Who Choreograph Sex Scenes," Amanda Duberman says, "They are the person in the room whose job it is to discuss and understand an actor's comfort with various aspects and types of touch in scenes of physical intimacy…If an actor or director deviates from the predetermined choreography, an intimacy director can intervene, relieving performers themselves of the fraught responsibility to confront one another about a drifting hand, or to challenge a director pushing for more contact or nudity than previously agreed upon."[55] Intimacy Directors International was founded by four women (Tonia Sina, Alicia Rodis, Siobhan Richardson, and Claire Warden) who had experienced "inappropriate behavior themselves on sets or witnessed mishandling of scenes involving physical touch."[56] As intimacy directors, the four women argue for "standardized protocols and procedures" for actors, stating, "When you have a profession where people have to touch each other at their job, there need to be rules around that."[57]

In reconciling these inclusive directing pedagogies, I have found it advantageous to not only include directors who work in commercial and traditional theater but those who produce theater in the margins: directing for smaller companies and community-based theaters. In this

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Amanda Duberman, "Meet The 'Intimacy Directors' Who Choreograph Sex Scenes," *Huffpost Personal,* May 30, 2018, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/intimacy-directors-choreograph-sex-scenes_n_5b0d87dae4b0fdb2aa574564.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Tonia Sina quoted in "Meet The 'Intimacy Directors.'"

way, I seek to create what Henry Giroux describes in *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (1992) as "border pedagogy."[58] Giroux advocates for educators to "challenge existing boundaries of knowledge and create new ones"[59] by teaching students how to read different cultural and institutional codes while simultaneously learning the limits of these codes, including the ones they use to "construct their own narratives and histories."[60]

By cultivating the knowledge and best practices of artists working in the margins - those who refuse to measure their success by ticket sales or reviews but instead by the feedback of their participants and actors - directors can address the ways "inequalities, power, and human suffering"[61] have been embedded in theatrical practices. And, begin, as I am trying to do, to catalogue the artistic tools needed to remake longstanding oppressive practices within the discipline. Simultaneously, the facilit*auteur* is a provocation to validate directing methodologies that have been historically employed by feminist and anti-racist directors who reject masculinist, white-supremacist authoritarian processes, opting instead for methodologies informed by egalitarian practices.

Masculinist Ideologies Explained

When I think about how I was as a young director, I realize there was so much posturing and trying to be what I thought a director should be. The only people I had to model after were much older men.[62] – May Adrales

As an undergraduate, I was taught directing through a conservatory-styled method. Over the course of my two-year program, students were systematically cut. My original cohort of 30 students concluded with only 4. My directing program focused on story-telling, text analyses,

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[58] Henry A. Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (New York: Routledge, 1992); 29.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] May Adrales, interview by author, April 15, 2018.

and staging techniques. Over the course of my undergraduate directing career I developed a reputation for being a "serious" director with an actor once telling me (unsarcastically) "I know you take this work seriously because you are always smoking and brooding." Upon graduation, I was selected (after a lot of persistence on my part) to work as a company management intern at a large regional theater in Baltimore. It was there that I *heard* about equity contracts and donor solicitation but *learned* how to clean artist housing and pick up the artistic director's laundry. After freelance directing for two years, I started my own company, becoming an artistic leader whose values were very much antithetical to creating an egalitarian society, but very much informed by my schooling, observations, and subsequent directing experience. In short, I became a bit of an authoritarian auteur.

During the five years that I ran my company, I produced over sixty productions[63] and worked with dozens of directors. We were often the theater where a director could gain experience; in other words, we primarily hired inexperienced artists who would work for cheap. Although I thought of myself as a generous collaborator, it was only when I began my graduate studies in feminist performance practices that I realized I had been imitating a kind of masculinist leadership I thought was necessary for the position, and, through my leadership role, was perpetuating masculinist directing practices toward everyone I worked with.

In my experiences with undergraduate directors, I often feel as if they (like myself) come into the classroom or rehearsal room with a preconceived notion of how to act the part of an auteur. Jean Burgess explores this same phenomenon in her introduction to *Collaborative Stage Directing*:

> I also repeatedly observed a misunderstanding among student directors about the role of the director, especially as it relates to directing their peers. This misunderstanding was so intense and destructive to the spirit of directing that I feel it needs to be addressed. If we

[63] This figure includes season shows, festival performances, and staged readings.

> can help young directors avoid this misunderstanding from the onset, together we will go a long way in helping them develop as successful directors. What is this colossal misunderstanding? That somehow a director is the boss of the production. Other words can be interjected: "head," dictator," or "grand master." I once walked past the rehearsal studio and overheard a student director yelling at her cast, "This is *my* show and you're making me look bad." Clearly this misunderstanding was learned somewhere along the line.[64]

In "Stanislavsky: Uncensored and Unabridged," Sharon Marie Carnicke asserts that auteur myths are proliferated in "theatrical circles"[65] and popular culture. Carnicke states that "audiences do not need to study theatre to get the central joke"[66] in *Outrageous Fortune*, a film in which Shelley Long and Bette Midler vie for a coveted position in an acting class taught by a demanding teacher with a vaguely Eastern European accent. The central joke being: in theater, the teacher/director has permission to abuse the student/actor.

After putting out a simple call on social media for other examples of how directors are represented in popular culture, I received a myriad of replies of the normalization of authoritarianism in directors, acting teachers, and choreographers including Sue Sylvester on *Glee* (2009-2015), Adam Driver's character in *Marriage Story* (2019), Henry Winkler's character in *Barry* (2018-), the depiction of Bob Fosse on FX's *Fosse/Verdon* (2019), the coach from Netflix's *Cheer* (2020-2021), an episode of the Simpson's entitled "A Streetcar Called Marge" (1992), and a very relatable skit on SNL in which Will Ferrell tortures a group of high school actors as he decides who he will cast for a production of *Bye Bye Birdie* (2019). As Carnicke asserts, these depictions often stem from the image of Stanislavsky: "Pronounce the name Stanislavsky and you invoke mythic images: a grandfatherly teacher in *pince-nez* who reveals the secrets of great acting to insecure young students; a strict disciplinarian who demands

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[64] Burgess, xiiii.
[65] Sharon Marie Carnicke, "Stanislavsky: Uncensored and Unabridged," in *Re:Direction: a Theoretical and Practical Guide*, eds. Rebecca Schneider and Gabrielle H. Cody (London: Routledge, 2002), 28.
[66] Ibid.

total commitment to the art; a great realistic director who harnesses truths embedded in plays and in actors' souls."[67]

Carnicke asserts that within the United States these images are insidious and seeks to disprove, or at least complicate, Stanislavsky's mythos. As she writes in "Stanislavsky and Politics: Active Analysis and the American Legacy of Soviet Oppression," "…he viewed the actor as an autonomous artist, saw realism as only one in a myriad of equally profound theatrical styles, and developed a compendium of acting techniques…"[68] Despite Carnicke's attempt at revisioning history, the equation of the director with power is deeply embedded within the American theater lexicon, partly due to an actual tendency for directors to take on authoritarian traits and partly due to history's glorification of these traits.

As a seminal text on directing, Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy's *Directors on Directing: A Source Book of the Modern Theatre* (1963) is largely responsible for giving visibility to directors, and, extraneously, perpetuating the myth that a good director (or at least a director worth writing about) is likely a disciplinarian. Chinoy writes, "Less than a hundred years ago the director was only an ideal projected by disgruntled critics of the chaotic Victorian theater."[69] Chinoy describes this imagined director as a "disciplinarian who would superintend the whole conduct of the piece and exact a rigid but just decorum."[70] Chinoy singles out Andre Antoine, Konstantin Stanislavsky, Edward Gordon Craig, Max Reinhardt, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Jacques Copeau as the "animators of modern theater."[71] Although each director had their

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[67] Ibid.
[68] Sharon Marie Carnicke, "Stanislavsky and Politics: Active Analyses and the American Legacy of Soviet Oppression," in *The Politics of American Actor Training*, eds. Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud (New York: Routledge, 2010), 15.
[69] Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, *Directors on Directing: A Source Book of the Modern Theatre* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 3.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.

own unique process, scholar Charlotte Canning suggests that history tends to glorify (primarily) men who exhibit these "disciplinarian" traits.

In her article "Directing History: Women, Performance, and Scholarship," Canning pushes back against the "usual suspects"[72] found within *Directors on Directing* and "the assumptions and definitions that guided the book's compilation."[73] Having become a standard reference text since being published over fifty years ago, *Directors on Directing*, Canning insists, enforces a limited historical narrative surrounding the director's position and practice. Canning acknowledges that the historical narrative that focuses on "heroic figures whose towering genius had an enduring effect on theatre's practices even into the current moment"[74] was not precipitated by Cole and Chinoy. Rather, the included figures have long existed in the canon. Canning does not contest the contributions of the primarily male figures in the book; she does, however, offer that by limiting the history of directors we are limiting the potential for new interpretations and meanings of the director's role and asserts, "…perhaps innovative theatrical practices can emerge from an emphasis on what has been elided, silenced, and suppressed."[75]

Canning shrewdly argues that history begets history. In other words, how Anglo-Americans practice directing is directly influenced by the figures we have studied. To demonstrate her point, Canning focuses on the theater periodical, *Theatre Arts*, founded in 1916 by critic Sheldon Cheney. Cheney was influenced by the European art theater movement and sought to foster a serious appreciation of theater untethered from celebrity gossip.[76] Up to this point, the director's role had several names – producer, stage manager, producing director – and

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[72] Charlotte Canning, "Directing History: Women, Performance, and Scholarship," *Theatre Research International* 30, no. 1 (2005): 49.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 50.
[75] Ibid., 58.
[76] Ibid., 51.

was often performed by the play's lead actor or writer. With the emergence of naturalism and its subsequent use of technology in the form of design, a cohesive production demanded a singular guiding vision. In its first editorial, Cheney emphasized the role of the director in creating a "'holistic intersection of every area of performance from the actor's art to the use of technology.'"[77]

Most articles written on directors spoke with an authoritative tone and were focused closely on the work of a single director. While *Theatre Arts* sought to promote, validate, and celebrate the role of the director, the magazine is also responsible for characterizing (in perpetuity) the director as a single visionary. As Canning argues, *Theatre Arts'* decision to feature predominantly male auteur directors "foregrounded the director as the sole individual authoring the theatrical experience both through content which described methodologies and practices, and through form, which isolated each director from a community of practitioners."[78]

Not only has the emphasis on singular visionary directors perpetuated authoritarian ideologies, it largely left women out of its history. The emphasis on auteur directors created a model that categorized women's artistic labor differently, and often, women were just plain ignored. Hallie Flanagan, the first woman to receive the Guggenheim Fellowship to study theater in Europe, wrote *Shifting Scenes of the Modern European Theater* (1928), which led to her position as founder of the Federal Theatre Project (1935-39). In this capacity she was responsible for distributing 27 million dollars in federal funding and employing tens of thousands of out of work performers; yet she was simply categorized as an "educator" in this influential periodical.[79]

[77] Ibid., 51.
[78] Cheney quoted in Canning, 52.
[79] Cheney quoted in Canning, 52.

A number of women directors I have spoken with noted that they are constantly having to prove themselves, replicating this authoritarian process in order to be taken seriously. In *Women Stage Directors Speak* (1996), Rebecca Daniels writes "A number of women, most especially those who are in the early years of their directing career, believe they are constantly being put in the position of having to prove again and again that they can handle the job."[80] Since Daniels' book was published in 1996, women directors have begun to occupy more space in the industry. However, rampant sexism is still an issue. In 2020, *Backstage* featured an article about an up-and-coming 25-year old director, Sammi Cannold, who spoke "indirectly" about the "insidious sexism" that continues to pervade the industry. The article's author, Casey Mink, writes "Cannold indirectly, touches on the insidious sexism that works against all female directors, but especially young ones: the inherent belief that they cannot lead a room…Cannold admits she's had to fight impulses to posture, to show off as a means of proving herself."[81] As Cannold asserts, she has witnessed other directors mimicking auteur qualities in an effort to gain the trust of the room. "Depending on the university you come out of as a young director, oftentimes you try to just prove to your actors how smart you are, which is completely wrong."[82]

As Canning demonstrates, what we know about directing is not only framed by the practitioners who wrote about it but also by the subsequent practitioners and scholars who selected which practitioners to write about. Moreover, these authoritarian directing values often put women in the position of proving themselves. The way in which the directing discipline operates is both incestuous and isolating. Meaning, while bad habits continue to perpetuate

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[80] Rebecca Daniels, *Women Stage Directors Speak: Exploring the Influence of Gender on Their Work* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2000), 65.
[81] Casey Mink, "Meet the 25-Year-Old Director Changing New York Theater From the Inside Out," *Backstage,* February 24, 2020.
[82] Ibid.

themselves in this pass-it-down process, directors perform their duties in somewhat of a vacuum with little to no oversight. Director Whitney White calls directors "satellites,"[83] orbiting each other but rarely communicating. At the same time, directors remain hugely influential in determining the culture and methodological norms of the directing craft and theater in general. To that end, this project heeds Canning's call and considers what has been "elided, silenced, and suppressed"[84] through historically giving more focus to male authoritarian directors.

Facilit*auteur*: Inspirational Figures

The auteur realm has been reserved for men because we don't like to see women as geniuses.[85]
-Sara Holdren

In *Women in American Theatre* (1981; 3rd ed. 2006), Helen Krich Chinoy writes:

> If the job is lowly, the organization experimental or community-oriented, or the artistic skill new, women are likely to be found doing the work. Once the job becomes an executive or top administrative one or the organization successful or nationally important, or the skill organized into a profession, women's role seems to diminish and their original pioneer work often ignored or forgotten…For women's careers in theatre, it has resulted in both lack of opportunity and a neglected history of accomplishments.[86]

While my primary interest for this project is to develop theories of knowledge surrounding collaborative directing methodologies, I tangentially attend to a history of neglect surrounding women's artistic labor. In reconciling methodologies behind collaborative directing processes, I articulate techniques applied by theater makers who employ what Weaver describes as "resistant methodologies" that "realter power structures."[87] These resistant methodologies often take the form of exercises and techniques that have been developed in reaction to coercive

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[83] Whitney White, "Women in Theatre: Resetting the Stage," Roundabout Theatre Company, January 22, 2018.
[84] Canning, 58.
[85] Sarah Holdren, "Professional Directions," Department of Performing and Media Arts at Cornell University, October 22, 2018.
[86] Helen Krich Chinoy, "If Not An Actress, WHAT," in *Women in American Theatre*, eds. Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006), 179.
[87] Lois Weaver, "Feminist Directions," roundtable, Department of Performing and Media Arts, Cornell University, May 16, 2019.

and oppressive practices that tend to erase or negate the cultural, social, and gendered experiences of women.

I was first introduced to resistant directing methodologies through the archives. As a practitioner, I focused on relentlessly making work. For me, directing was primarily based on outcomes. After running a small theater, I measured success through positive reviews and a healthy box office. I did not necessarily consider *how* the work was made or even fully reconcile the social, cultural, and political implications of the work. When I burned out of the artist hustle, I went back to school in the hopes of gaining the tools to become a more thoughtful and intentional artist. In one of my first courses as a master's student at New York University, I was tasked with writing a 30-page paper using archival materials. After wrapping my head around the idea of writing such a long paper, I immersed myself in the feminist performances found at the Lesbian Herstory Archives and NYU's Fales Library & Special Collections. Through this research, I fell in love with the lesbian feminist performance groups More Fire! Productions and Split Britches.

Both More Fire! Productions and Split Britches were founded in 1980 (although the group's members were creating theater long before that). More Fire! Productions was founded by two friends, Robin Epstein and Dorothy Cantwell who attended SUNY College together in 1973. In describing her meta-play *Art Failures* (about a group of lesbian artists who can't find a producer for their play "Shabbos Night Fever"), Epstein says "*Art Failures* was about what it meant to me to have created a group that was necessarily, and by choice, marginal. I accepted marginality and didn't expect anything else; it became something we could use to make art."[88]

[88] Robin Epstein and Dorothy Cantwell, "More Fire! Productions in the East Village" (talk delivered at the Modern Language Association, Philadelphia, December 29, 2006). New York Performing Arts Public Library, More Fire! Productions Papers, 11.

Like other lesbian feminist performance groups emerging at the time, More Fire! not only accepted marginality but created theater from a specifically marginal position. As Epstein alludes, there was a freedom in refusing (or being refused by) larger producing houses.[89]

Split Britches, founded by Lois Weaver, Peggy Shaw, and Deb Margolin, put as much emphasis on the content of their shows as on how those shows got made. Lois Weaver, who generally served as the group's director, approached the playmaking processes democratically. In creating *Upwardly Mobile Home* (1984), a critique of "Reaganomics" and New York City's "revitalization" process, Weaver created an environment where the women could direct themselves. Although Weaver says that her tendency was always to be the one to stand up and say "…You're going to have to stand a little more upstage."[90] Weaver attributes collective leadership with empowering her actors to develop their own distinct voice (free from the limiting constraints of one artistic lens).

The kind of actor-centered collectivity mentioned above is one of the bedrocks of the facili*tauteur*. Roberta Sklar, co-founder of Women's Experimental Theatre (WET), for example, resisted traditional ways of working with actors she had learned from her male mentors at the Open Theater. "Everything I knew was generated by male traditions…The traditional approach to acting – stripping away layers, breaking down defenses, and building up from nothing – didn't seem to apply to women."[91] Sklar refused to direct in a domineering mode that dictated prescriptions of what "good" and "bad" acting concepts entailed, which are often raced and

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[89] Contemporaries of Split Britches, More Fire! Productions (1980-88) was founded by Robin Epstein and Dorothy Cantwell. More Fire! Productions was part of NYC's downtown experimental art scene. Epstein and Cantwell wrote about lesbian-women's experience. Notable productions include *As the Burger Broils* and *Junk Love* (1981). In 1983, writer Sarah Schulman joined the company, producing *Art Failures* (1983).

[90] Lois Weaver, interviewer unknown, February 1, 1985, Split Britches Archives, Fales Library, New York University, 5.

[91] Canning, 90.

gendered. Instead, Sklar worked on being able to consciously help her actors learn to shape, control, and project their feelings using ensemble building exercises.

With the ongoing process of peeling back my own white lens, I recognize that many of the practical and ideological underpinnings of the facilit*auteur* have been developed through indigenous and African traditions. As Sharrell D. Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer note in the introduction to *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* (2016), Black/African rituals and theatrical processes have been systematically stripped from the theatrical canon and only recently have Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) theater makers been able to have their voices heard regarding the ways in which American theater has standardized Eurocentric theatrical practices. Luckett and Shaffer articulate the ways in which Afrocentric rituals go unnamed in theater pedagogy. "Further, many acting spaces do not point out that the most common formations and activities in acting classes are in fact ideologies borne of African thought and ways of understanding the world, such as the formation of the circle, improvisation, ensemble (community) building, vulnerability, and the combination of acting, dance, and song, i.e., musical theatre."[92] According to Luckett, practices such as warm ups, improvised scene work, and the blend of music, dance, and dialogue (the American musical) all stem from African/Indigenous art-making traditions. Through these Afrocentric methods, such as ensemble building and vulnerability, Luckett and Shaffer invite a more inclusive and "culturally-specific contribution to performance pedagogy."[93]

In naming vulnerability and authenticity as key ingredients in collaborative directing, I have been influenced by the late director, Laurie Carlos. I first encountered Carlos' work through

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[92] Sharrell D. Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer, eds., *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 2.
[93] Ibid., 1.

her collaborator, Omi Osum Joni L. Jones. I participated in a 2017 Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) workshop led by Jones called "Theatrical Jazz" in which Jones employed a handful of Carlos' exercises. Carlos was a holistic theater maker, working as an actor, playwright, dancer, and director. In "Making Language: The Jazz Aesthetic and Feminist Foundations" (2007), Jones describes Carlos as employing collaborative methodologies that emphasized ethics of care. As Jones expresses, Carlos' Afrocentric ethics of care is built on the idea that caring about others should be the foundation for education and justice.[94] Before each rehearsal, Carlos would ask the performers and technical crew to create a circle and check-in with how they were feeling that day. Carlos would often bring in fruits and nuts as a way of providing care and sustenance for her cast. At the same time, Carlos set boundaries, refusing to take on the role of caretaker often prescribed to Black women. Jones notes that Carlos' acts of care were "neither condescending nor precious."[95]

While I contend that women have perhaps been the most vocal and visible proponents of the collaborative methodologies I ascribe to the facilit*auteur*, it should be noted that many leaders of feminist collectives were trained by men. The Open Theater's collaborative methodologies (led by Joseph Chaiken) provided the foundation for feminist performance makers Muriel Miguel (Spiderwoman Theater) and Rebecca Sklar (Women's Experimental Theatre), although they eventually left the group, citing the theater's "steadfast male point of view."[96] Lois Weaver trained and studied under Jerzy Grotowski, whose "poor theatre" aesthetic is an influential force in Split Britches performances. This project is not meant to imply that men

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[94] Joni L. Jones (Omi Osun Olomo), Laurie Carlos, and Sharon Bridgforth, "Making Language: The Jazz Aesthetic and Feminist Foundations," in *Radical Acts: Theatre and Feminist Pedagogies of Change,* eds. Ann Elizabeth Armstrong and Kathleen Juhl (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 96.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century,* 36.

are incapable of practicing power differently. It is to say, however, that masculinist ideologies surrounding the directing discipline have been substantially normalized.

It may be no surprise that the directors who inspired this project have rarely reached commercial success. During Roundabout Theater Company's 2018 panel, "Women in Theatre: Resetting the Stage," director Rebecca Taichman suggested that money (and therefore power) is the mitigating factor in maintaining institutional norms, including the negligible numbers of women directors helming Broadway shows. Taichman states that "the closer you get to the money, it's like the dark ages…"[97] In 2018-2019, for example, women directed only 13% of Broadway productions, and all those women were white.[98]

While women are rarely able to break the commercial theater glass ceiling, directors who resist masculinist theater practices often avoid commercial projects. In 1980, director Glenda Dickerson was one of the first Black women to direct on Broadway with the musical *Reggae*. After the project, Dickerson stated "I'd never do it again…I was always very ensemble-oriented…commercial theatre was never satisfying."[99] In addition, the directors I spoke to indicated that commercial theater can be creatively limiting. Director Liz Diamond avoids commercial theater, noting that she is most interested in directing plays that address "societal fault lines."[100] Diamond describes American theater as "too provincial" and prefers to direct plays that address social, cultural, and political issues that Broadway tends to avoid. Additionally, Diamond notes that many of the plays she is attracted to are written by women and people of color who are less often – to put it mildly - produced on commercial stages.

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[97] Rebecca Taichman, "Women in Theatre: Resetting the Stage," Roundabout Theatre Company, January 22, 2018.
[98] Tim Teeman, "See Us, Trust Us, Employ Us: Broadway's Women of Color on Confronting Racism—and Reshaping Theater," *The Daily Beast*, August 29, 2019.
[99] Glenda Dickerson quoted in *American Women Stage Directors*, 153.
[100] Liz Diamond, interview by author, April 5, 2018.

It is my contention that collaboration has often been a methodology employed and championed by women, feminists, and marginalized directors seeking to disrupt hegemonic systems of power. Because of this, my project positions women as the lens through which these valuable techniques are viewed, offering that women continue to be important authors of directing epistemology.

Research as Practice, Practice as Research

> *I think that there is an aspect of teaching in facilitation, a big aspect of it and especially with non-professionals. It's the art of listening and responding to what the room is doing.*[101]
> – Sarah Chalmers

My dissertation is couched within the familiar ethnographic framework of case studies and interviews; the predominant mode in which women directors have made their footprint known within directing history. Ethnographies and auto/ethnographies have historically been ways for women to tell their own stories, resulting in a kind of consciousness raising regarding women's artistic approaches and experiences within the discipline. In addition, auto/ethnographies provide visibility to women directors. As evidenced by Canning's research, women's artistic labor has been historically ignored and, in some cases, erased within the discipline. Auto/ethnographies demand that women's work be put on the record.

Directing ethnographies have come in several forms, the most radical, perhaps, through word of mouth. Personal narratives are possibly the most common type of ethnographic writing directors engage in. One of the most influential pioneers of this type of ethnographic anthology is *Upstaging Big Daddy* (1993), a collection of case studies from directors who assert that artists have a responsibility to create work within a framework of social awareness.[102] Each of my case

[101] Sarah Chalmers, interview by author, January 8, 2019.
[102] Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement, *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater As If Gender and Race Matter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 2.

studies offers a first-hand account of the ways in which directors have navigated varying social, political, and cultural issues within the rehearsal room, including directing feminist material, navigating culturally specific texts, adapting canonical texts through a queer lens, and cross-gender casting.

Anne Bogart has been one of the most prolific authors of directing processes. She has written various books – *A Director Prepares* (2001), *Viewpoints* (2004), *And Then, You Act* (2007), and *What's the Story* (2014) – that employ the use of auto/ethnographic reflections that address intangible aspects of directing. In *A Director Prepares,* for example, Bogart identifies seven common issues she encounters in her work "violence, memory, terror, eroticism, stereotype, embarrassment, and resistance."[103] She uses these issues as an entry point to discuss ambiguous aspects of the artistic process, especially as it pertains to working with actors.

Additionally, auto/ethnographies have been used to provide more formal step-by-step guides to directing such as Mary B. Robinson's *Directing Plays Directing People* (2012), Katie Mitchell's *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (2008), and Carolyn Gage's *Take Stage!: How to Direct and Produce a Lesbian Play* (1997). Other books, such as Anne Bogart's *Conversations with Anne* (2012), Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova's *Directors/Directing* (2009), and Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst's *On Directing* (1999), use ethnographic interviews to interrogate individual directing processes.

As evidenced by the work mentioned above, auto/ethnographies provide women the opportunity to name oppressive practices they have encountered, circulate resistant methodologies, make visible their artistic labor, and consign these methodologies into the mainstream. In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), José

[103] Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2001), 2.

Esteban Muñoz asserts that auto/ethnographies "disrupt the hierarchal economy"[104] of unexamined institutional practices, especially those that urgently need to be revisited. Muñoz argues that power and resistance are always in conversation with one another. Power does not exist without resistance to it and resistance does not exist without power. Because of this, Muñoz asserts that auto/ethnography makes visible the presence of "subaltern energies" within the "metropolitan."[105] Muñoz complicates the binary of "colonizer" or "metropolitan" and "colonized" or "subaltern" and instead provides evidence that the subaltern speaks through the same representational channels as the metropolitan.

Muñoz's theories surrounding auto/ethnography imply that women and other marginalized theater makers are educated within the same masculinist frameworks as white men. As Carnicke demonstrates, knowledge surrounding authoritarian directing practices has already been widely circulated within the zeitgeist. As such, it is through auto/ethnography that women can speak back to these masculinist practices and circulate new kinds of knowledge about the discipline within the same channels and with the same artistic language that the discipline has perpetuated itself.

As a vessel for situated knowledge, auto/ethnography has the potential to resist dominant ideologies and "fill in the gaps" of mainstream theories of knowledge. In other words, oppressive directing practices are unsettled through the articulation of collaborative directing methodologies. In "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1988), Donna Haraway argues that there is good reason to trust subjugated vantage points, noting that the "vision is better below the brilliant space platforms of

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[104] Muñoz, José Esteban, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 82.
[105] Ibid.

the powerful."[106] Like Muñoz, Haraway indicates that women are at once part and apart from systems of power. Haraway implies that through the serious consideration of these situated perspectives there is the potential to generate "more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world."[107]

The figure of the facilit*auteur* is motivated by my own experiences, both as a practitioner and an academic. In many ways, I follow the ethnographic blueprint set forth by Dorinne Kondo in *Worldmaking: Race, Performance, and the Work of Creativity* (2018). Kondo begins her text by chronicling her shift from academia to playwriting and back to academia again. As Kondo states, her life in academia had increasingly become a "day job, routine and boring."[108] Kondo blames this in part to a cultural Cartesian dualism splitting between the academy and artistic practice, noting that "In the academy, the enshrining of analysis and the intellect, and, in the corporate university, a Taylorist drive toward relentless productivity compel us to repress the body, the emotions, and the powers of fantasy and comedy."[109] To that end, Kondo uses auto/ethnography to analyze the artistic experiences and encounters that inform her book, arguing "performance involves a bodily, sensorial, affective, intellectually complex encounter with the world."[110] As Kondo asserts, these embodied encounters are already embedded in the work, shaping her analyses and guiding her writing.

Like Kondo, my personal artistic experiences shape my interests in this project. After spending a decade working as a freelance director, academia has given me valuable time and

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[106] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988), 583.
[107] Ibid., 584.
[108] Dorinne K. Kondo, *Worldmaking: Race, Performance, and the Work of Creativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 2.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., 6.

theoretical insights into the social and political underpinnings that shaped my directorial process. Hustling from one project to the next, I rarely took the time to interrogate my relationship to my collaborators. In some respects, I relied on me having a thing that actors wanted: roles in a show. Perhaps exclusively by necessity (although maybe I am being too hard on my younger self), I cultivated fruitful collaborations with designers, stage managers, and other production crew because their labor was in short supply. Actors' labor was not. In this way, I am revisiting my "complex encounter with the world" through the lens of scholarship and interrogating the "business-as-usual" processes that perpetuate oppressive practices. At the same time, I acknowledge that I am in a privileged position to be able to do so. As a freelance director, I was primarily concerned with creating a critically sound show for the producing theater. As an artistic director, I was concerned with ensuring that each production would bring in enough tickets sales to support the next production. Without having the time to reflect, I was unable to see how my own process perpetuated masculinist ideologies despite being a self-proclaimed feminist.

Some of the major fields of study this project is in conversation with - performance studies, ethnography, affect studies, theories surrounding social work, critical race studies, and gender studies – have all abandoned the idea that a researcher can be objective. Research is always viewed and interpreted through the lived experience of the researcher. Additionally, it is only relatively recently within theater that so-called objective ideologies surrounding "good art" and universalizing "human experiences" have been exposed as weaponized whiteness. Donna Haraway proposes that situated knowledges refute objectivity, positing that objective ideologies "unmark positions of Man and White."[111] In putting language to the directing processes I present

[111] Haraway, 581.

in this project, unmarking positions of man and white (and the false assumptions of objectivity embedded therein) is essentially the goal.

As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, we really do not know what techniques, methods, and praxis were lost through the perpetuation of theater's "scared monsters." However, recent changes within the field indicate that by unmarking positions of "Man and White," theater only grows more expansive. Without such unmarking, Broadway shows such as Michael R. Jackson's *A Strange Loop* (2019), with its gay Black protagonist and cast of all LGBTQIA+ actors of color, would likely not have passed through the gateway.

Although I may not be an objective researcher, I strive to be a critical one by following the critical ethnographic methods outlined by Soyini Madison in *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (2005). Madison argues that critical ethnography "begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain."[112] To illustrate her point, Madison recounts viewing a short documentary in a local film festival. The subject of the film related to women's human rights in Ghana, West Africa. Madison recounts being excited to see the film, having done extensive fieldwork in Ghana working with victims of human rights abuses. As Madison describes, the film "told a tragic, compelling, beautiful, and well-crafted story of a young woman fleeing a dangerous country where there was no protection from the wrath of her father and the mutilation of her body; moreover, the enormous pain and injustice threatening the woman was all averted in the only option available to her: asylum – the safe haven of the United States."[113] As Madison notes, however, the film erased the Ghanaian activist work she had witnessed first-hand. And by doing

[112] Soyini D. Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012), 4.
[113] Ibid., 2.

so, it stripped Ghanaian women of agency by implying that their only refuge was fleeing to another country.

Madison uses this documentary to demonstrate the stakes of an interpreter in both "presenting and representing the lives and the stories of others whom you have come to know and who have given you permission to reveal their stories."[114] Good intentions aside, Madison contends that ethnographers have a responsibility to be self-reflexive, predict the consequences of their work, establish a collaborative and dialogical relationship with their subjects, position the work within a broader context, and ask "how – in what location or through what intervention – will our work make the greatest contribution to equity, freedom, and justice?"[115] Madison urges ethnographers to use their resources, skills, and privileges to make accessible the experiences of those who are "otherwise restrained and out of reach."[116]

In articulating my fieldwork, I seek to position it within a discourse of directing that direly needs updating. Additionally, I endeavor to make visible collaborative processes that have long existed within the field. I assert that because these methodologies fall within what has been categorized as "feminine domains" – vulnerability, empathy, listening, ethics of care – they simply have not been written about widely. Without new theories of knowledge, the directing discipline remains stagnant, reproducing the same methods being handed down over and over again.

Methods

> *Directing is a mysterious craft… whatever you want to do is going to ask you to use different parts of yourself and prepare in different ways, and work with actors in different ways.*[117]
> – Emily Mann

[114] Ibid., 3.
[115] Ibid., 4.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Emily Mann, interview by author, February 25, 2019.

As a longtime practitioner, I have often been wary of theorizing practical artistic methodologies. Directing is a slippery discipline. As a director, I have been confronted with a multitude of unforeseen circumstances that I dare say the handling of which could not be theorized, ranging from a playwright drunkenly berating the show's actors during tech week to an entire cast contracting swine flu two weeks before opening night. At the same time, how I respond to these situations is informed by an accumulation of knowledge that I form into theories about, for example, how the playwright will respond if I take the actionable step of separating them from the cast and listening to their concerns. In the same vein, I apply theories surrounding cognition, empathy, vulnerability, social work, ethnography, and feminism to provide evidence that collaboration, put into practice, is indeed effective.

Seen through the lens of critical ethnography, theory and method (or praxis) are intertwined. Madison acknowledges, as Kondo does, that the "relationship between theory and method has a long and provocative history reflected in disciplinary boundaries and research traditions…"[118] Anne Bogart has been a longtime proponent of theoretical writing, insisting that it has the potential to disrupt and/or enhance business as usual within the field. She states, "In the articulation begins a new organization of the inherited landscape."[119] Madison calls theory "the guiding principles of our doing"[120] and asserts that theory is already embedded within performance. Furthermore, Madison argues that theory becomes a method when it is used as a mode of interpretation.[121] Method separates from theory when it becomes a specific, concrete task.

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[118] Madison, 8.
[119] Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3.
[120] Madison, 9.
[121] Ibid.

In reconciling the divided labor between scholars and practitioners, ethnographer and performance studies scholar Dwight Conquergood sets forth a unifying mission in "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research" (1988). Conquergood asserts that performance studies is "uniquely suited for the challenge of braiding together disparate and stratified ways of knowing."[122] Conquergood offers an alliterative articulation of the ways in which theory and practice inform each other: the three A's. *Accomplishment* is the making of art and remaking of culture, the knowledge that comes from practice. *Analysis* is the interpretation of art, using performance as a lens to think through human communication. Finally, *articulation* refers to applications and interventions.[123] If accomplishment is practice and analysis is theory, then articulation is the intersection between the two. As Conquergood states, it is a knowledge that has been tested by practice within the community: practice informed by theory. I, similarly, seek to analyze the directorial practices I have experienced and witnessed in order to articulate the particular interventions that my case studies demonstrate about how directing as a discipline is conceived. In articulating the particular skillsets of the facilit*auteur*, I offer this project as an invitation for other artist-scholars to break down the methodological components of directorial processes that have largely been ignored within directing pedagogy.

Over the course of three years, I observed and interviewed over a dozen directors who exemplify an aspect (or multiple aspects) of a facilit*auteur:* May Adrales, Sarah Chalmers, Tisa Chang, Rachel Chavkin, Liz Diamond, Leigh Fondakowski, Rhodessa Jones, Emily Mann, Sue Perlgut, Leigh Silverman, Lois Weaver, Tamilla Woodard, and Kat Yen. In cultivating this list, I considered directors who are vocal proponents of resistant methodologies and of women's

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[122] Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," TDR (1988-) 46, no. 2 (2002): 145-156. Accessed April 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/1146965).
[123] Conquergood, 152.

visibility, and who engage with socially conscious material. In some cases, I knew the artists; in other cases, I called on colleagues, committee members, and even the artists I interviewed to make connections. Finally, in the instances of Rachel Chavkin and Leigh Silverman, I attended events in which they participated and approached them afterwards.

For the most part, interviews were structured similarly. Most lasted approximately an hour. All were recorded after I had attended a workshop, rehearsal(s), or viewed archival material. In most cases these were in-person but some, by necessity, were over the phone. I geared my questions toward their specific body of work but overall I asked directors similar questions: 1) what was their path to the director's chair; 2) what is their overall directorial approach/process; 3) who influenced their praxis; 4) what do they know now about directing they wish they knew as a younger director; 5) did they ever experience gender-based hardships; 6) how do they approach working with collaborators; 7) how do they select projects, and finally; 8) how did they support themselves while trying to become a director? Like any conversation though, I tried to stay open to where their answers led.

In the case of freelance director May Adrales, for example, the conversation veered towards her interests in cultivating new audiences for regional theaters. As an Artistic Director, Emily Mann spoke about structural inequalities within the discipline that motivates how she selects her seasons. Commercial theater director Leigh Silverman considered the differences between working in commercial theater and smaller Off-Broadway venues. Conversations with the Founder and Artistic Director of The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women, Rhodessa Jones, tended to revolve around making theater with participant-actors. Tisa Chang, Artistic Director of Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, has spent her life financially supporting and

advocating for her theater and had a particular interest in the connection between theater-making and fundraising.

After collating all of these discussions, I conscientiously selected four key figures to headline each chapter based on the techniques they exemplified (such as employing empathy, creating vulnerable spaces, developing cultural competency in the rehearsal room, etc.). I approached this project from the standpoint of a director who wants to better their own practice and excavate the "why" behind these exemplary directing methodologies. As a feminist director, I view this project as its own "personal is political"[124] offering, a consciousness raising piece of scholarship that I hope will inform other directors who might have found (like myself) themselves perpetuating what are now recognized to be oppressive directing practices.

The artists included in this project represent the various arenas in which directors make work. I have included directors who work in community-based, educational, self-produced, and commercial theater. I contend that the skills these directors have cultivated within their respective forms are transferrable across forms. By necessity, directors often apply their skills to varying circumstances. At one time or another, most self-produce. Many hone their skills in community theater before building professional careers. Rhodessa Jones, for example, adapted techniques she had learned in professional spaces working with participant actors. In many ways, the same techniques Jones uses to create a safe space, set flexible rehearsal room boundaries, and employ exercises to foster agency are applicable and adaptable across forms. Jones asserts that her process changes very little whether she is directing a community-based production or a professional project. Professional actors may be better versed in the language of theater, but as

[124] The term the "personal is political" is taken from Carol Hanisch's "The Personal Is Political," originally published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* in 1970.

Jones notes, they do not necessarily know how to assert their agency. Leigh Silverman echoes Jones, noting that she attends to experienced and inexperienced actors with the same care.

As a director dedicated to culturally-competent Asian representation, Tisa Chang offers insights into the ways in which a director can authentically engage with intercultural material. As the Founding Artistic Director of Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, Chang is uniquely positioned as both an insider and outsider to the culturally-specific productions she directs. Liz Diamond, who works with a mix of professional and student actors, is constantly adapting her responses to the varying skill levels in the room. Diamond has learned to read the room, becoming adept at when to give an actor space and when to challenge that actor. At the same time, simply by listening to her student actors' insights in the same way she listens to professional actors, she is training her student actors to take ownership of their characters. The skillsets I attend to in this project apply to two constants: first, that theater is a representation of culture and directors have a responsibility to the culture they are presenting; and second, that actors are by necessity entering into a vulnerable and intimate space when they embody characters, and that directors need to consider this in all performance contexts.

In resisting and/or filling in the gaps of mainstream masculinist directing ideologies, it was important to focus on directors who work outside these modes and identify with feminist ideologies. Although they may practice their feminism differently, the directors I have studied are deeply aware of how power circulates within the discipline (and the world) and make interventions to disrupt this power through their practice. Leigh Silverman, for example, assembled Broadway's first all-female design team for *Lifespan of a Fact* (2018) – which included cultivating an environment where the creative staff could bring their children to

rehearsals. Rhodessa Jones' identification as a "womanist"[125] informs her work with incarcerated women. Jones strongly believes that women telling their stories can change the world. Liz Diamond has been a visible advocate for women's parity within theater, speaking on panels and using her position at the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale to secure internship positions specifically for female students. Finally, Tisa Chang often centers the stories of women in her productions, noting, "I find it very interesting that strength and power have always been associated with a female image, a woman's image."[126]

In observing directors in rehearsal, I paid special attention to how they responded to actors. How did they respond to uncertainty and challenges? What were they doing when watching a scene unfold? When did they interject? When were they silent? What was their body doing? When did they get on their feet? And what was the purpose of these interactions? I focused on these situational and ephemeral interactions – body language, tone of voice, bodily interventions – to theorize the techniques behind them. In addition, I chronicled the practical exercises directors employed in developing a rehearsal room culture – such as warm-ups – and those used to help actors access their character – such as improvisation. I then selected to articulate techniques I felt were not widely circulated within the field.

In analyzing my observations, I followed the ethnographic schools of thought developed by Soyini Madison and Joni L. Jones. Jones asserts that ethnographers do not present a culture but instead act as interpreters of a culture;[127] she acknowledges that presenting a performance

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[125] In her book, *In Search of My Mother's Garden* (1983), Alice Walker defines "womanist" as "a black feminist or feminist of color."

[126] Tisa Chang, "Feminist Directions," roundtable, Department of Performing and Media Arts, Cornell University, May 16, 2019.

[127] Joni L. Jones, "Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity," *Theatre Topics* 12, no. 1 (March 1, 2002): 1–15. doi:10.1353/tt.2002.0004.

outside of its origin culture will inevitably change the performance.[128] I present what I have witnessed through the lens of my particular interests and recognize that the techniques offered will necessarily be adapted when applied by directors in other circumstances. As Jones implies, authenticity is a moving target. The processes interrogated here are not fixed entities but are offered as techniques to be subjectively applied and adapted. Rehearsal rooms are living spaces and will be different depending on who inhabits them. I also attend to Soyini Madison's assertion that ethnographers have a responsibility to intervene in ways that make the greatest contribution to social justice. In selecting the facilit*auteur* techniques I highlight, I attend to what I believe are the most urgent applications for developing more agentic, safe, and inclusive rehearsal rooms.

I have informed my observations and interviews with archival research at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and by consulting production programs, performance reviews, and articles featured on websites geared toward working artists, including *Playbill, Backstage,* and the *SDC Journal.* I often scoured *American Theatre* magazine and the *SDC Journal* for interviews, director highlights, and articles on shifting ideologies within the field. Additionally, I am grateful to the work of Anne Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow and their seminal biographies and praxis analyses of women directors, *American Women Stage Directors* (2008) and *International Women Stage Directors* (2013), which I consulted frequently. It should be noted that I am painfully aware that there are far more women directors that should be included in this project, especially those that work within the margins of community theater – who often have the most radical approaches to making work.

[128] Ibid., 12.

Chapter Previews

I really believe in a collaborative leadership, especially when it's based in telling the truth and practicing revolution.[129] – Rhodessa Jones

Chapter One focuses on cognitive aspects of empathy and speculation. "Managing Personalities, Cultivating Speculation: Leigh Silverman and *Hurricane Diane*" is an exploration of how a director cultivates artistic "instincts." Often lauded as a set of innate traits, I assert that instincts are a learned response refined to the point of being automatic. As the chapter's case study, Leigh Silverman hypothesizes that in navigating patriarchal systems she has learned transferrable skills that she applies to directing, such as "managing personalities" and making others feel comfortable. As I posit, these instincts are based on employing interpersonal empathy and speculation that begins as a set of experiences – both personal and professional – coagulating into automatic responses. Women and other marginalized directors have learned to apply emotional labor to the rehearsal room, often as a means of building artistic relationships so that they can continue to find work. Recognizing that actor comfort *matters* is the first and foremost priority of the facilit*auteur*. Without this recognition a director will not be motivated to build safe spaces or attend to perspectives outside of themselves. In deconstructing how empathy is applied to the rehearsal room, I demonstrate that thoughtfully responding to actors is a skill that can be learned. And, in the case of directors who direct in domineering ways, it can be unlearned.

In preparing this chapter, I attended a panel hosted by the Drama League entitled "In Conversation: Designing *The Lifespan of a Fact*" that centered on Silverman's unprecedented decision to employ an all-female design team for the 2018 Broadway run of *The Lifespan of a*

[129] Rhodessa Jones, interview by author, March 12, 2019.

Fact. In addition, I attended one four-hour rehearsal for the premiere of *Hurricane Diane* by Madeleine George during the production's fourth week (one week before tech) - a play that offers a divine alternative to manicured lawns - at the off-Broadway theater, New York Theatre Workshop. Finally, I attended the performances of *The Lifespan of a Fact* and *Hurricane Diane,* interviewing Silverman about both pieces on January 24, 2019. Silverman has reached what many theater artists consider to be the pinnacle of success – a career on Broadway. Yet, she cut her teeth as a production assistant at New York Theatre Workshop and, by her own omission, has sustained a career through her collaborative relationship with several notable playwrights. I begin my project with Silverman's case study to signify that: 1) empathy is a foundational building block for all other directing methods and 2) directors working at the highest level of theatrical forms – where arguably systems of power are at their most refined – can still attend to an actor's comfort.

Chapter Two focuses on actor vulnerability. Building upon Chapter One's assertion that facilit*auteurs* can learn how to apply empathy in rehearsal rooms, Chapter Two demonstrates how empathetic facilit*auteurs* can create rehearsal rooms where actors can safely be vulnerable and use that vulnerability as a source of power. "Taking Responsibility: Vulnerability, Boundaries, and Professional Ethics in Rhodessa Jones' Trauma-Informed Theater" is centered on Rhodessa Jones, Co-Artistic Director of Cultural Odyssey and the Founder and Artistic Director of The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women in San Francisco. Jones' work with participant-actors provides a model for eliciting vulnerability in rehearsals that acts in resistance to and complicates designations of "victim" and "criminal." Jones' ability to normalize vulnerable exchanges serves as an invitation to participants to share their stories, free from coercion and within a space that can contain these intimate relations. Within a community-

based framework, the success of Jones' work hinges on her ability to respond to participant-actors. Working under sometimes tenuous circumstances, Jones exemplifies the facilit*auteur* in her ability to create an intimate, safe space for her participants to be at their most vulnerable. Her process stands in direct contrast with that of directors who ask for vulnerability-on-demand, without considering the effects on the actor. Through Jones' process of mutual exchange of ideas, participants become agentic[130] theater-makers, negotiating the terms and boundaries of the rehearsal room space.

In preparing this chapter, I attended several workshops and lectures given by Jones as part of her three-year tenure as a Frank H.T. Rhodes Class of 1956 Visiting Professor at Cornell University. I interviewed Jones on November 8th, 2018 after attending The Medea Project's performance of *When Did Your Hands Become a Weapon?* at the Brava Arts Center in San Francisco on October 26, 2018. Additionally, I interviewed Jones again on March 12th, 2019 during one of her visits to Cornell University, shortly before she participated in the "Feminist Directions" roundtable, as part of the Feminist Directions: Performance, Power, and Leadership symposium at the Schwartz Center for Performing Arts at Cornell University on May 16, 2019. In addition, I participated in an 11-week Medea Project virtual workshop entitled "Arts Facilitator Best Practices: Tools for Teaching Inside Prison" (September 2-November 11, 2021) led by Jones and other members of The Medea Project, giving me insights into the complex

[130] "The word agentic is described as an individual's power to control his or her own goals actions and destiny. It stems from the word agency, which Webster's Dictionary defines as the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power. In the late 1980s, Stanford University Psychologist Albert Bandura began developing a theory of social cognition that he associated with self-efficacy. He later examined more specifically the role of agency and motivation, and coined the term 'agentic,' in which people are viewed as self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulated, which he calls 'agentic.' Agentic learning is defined by self-directed actions aimed at personal growth and development based on self-chosen goals. Within this context, students initiate actions of their own volition that drive their learning." (Marie Bjerede and Michael Gielniak, PhD, "What is Agentic Learning and Why is it Important?" *Getting Smart*, December 2021).

considerations and methods faced by Jones and her co-facilitators creating theater with marginalized participant-actors. As a director who has worked across theatrical forms, deciding to dedicate her life's work to working with incarcerated, previously incarcerated, and women with HIV, Jones has developed techniques for facilitating the excavation of the most raw and vulnerable stories imaginable and then shaping them into a performance. In doing so, Jones has developed processes for creating a rehearsal room container that can safely interrogate vulnerable experiences while also setting flexible boundaries that are negotiated between Jones and her participants. I argue that these flexible but methodologically informed practices can be applied within traditional rehearsal rooms for directors seeking an alternative to their top-down hierarchal practice.

Chapter Three, "The Dramaturgical Director (Tisa Chang): Authenticity within Culturally Specific Texts," focuses on the Founding Artistic Director of Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, Tisa Chang. Chang serves as a case study for approaching intercultural material. Whereas Chapter One (Silverman) and Chapter Two (Jones) focus on personal interactions with actors, Chang's chapter zooms out to consider the rehearsal room as a cultural environment. Chang immerses her actors in culturally-specific dramaturgy, allowing her actors to live within the culture they are being asked to represent. In doing so, her pan-Asian actors build a body connection to the culture they are inhabiting, allowing them to more "authentically" embody a culture that might not be their own. Framed through the idea of "authenticity," Chang focuses on integrating regionally-appropriate costumes, music, and dance, creating an environment in which culture can be embodied by the actors in a way that resists perfunctory prescriptions of "real" and "fake" culture.

In preparation for this chapter, I attended several shows produced by Pan Asian Rep as part of their 2019 NuWorks Festival. Before attending the events, I interviewed Chang over the phone on June 27th, 2018, discussing her process for making work. Although none of these shows was directed by Chang, I felt it was important to see the type of performances she selects and champions at her company. In addition, I visited the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts on several occasions in 2019 to view archival footage of plays directed by Chang, including those I discuss in this project, *China Doll* (2005) and *Cambodia Agonistes* (1992, 2005). Chang was a panelist on the "Feminist Directions" roundtable, facilitated by me, and led a workshop entitled "(Directing) Through the Pan Asian Mirror" (which I attended) as part of the Feminist Directions: Performance, Power, and Leadership symposium. I interviewed Chang shortly after the symposium to discuss her directorial practices on February 1, 2020. Chang was gearing up to direct a revisioning of *Cambodia Agonistes* (her first time directing in several years) when COVID hit in March 2020, putting the production indefinitely on hold. As the third case study in this project, Chang's chapter moves away from interpersonal relationships with actors and focuses on the rehearsal room itself. Chang imbues her rehearsal room with culturally-specific designs from the very beginning of the process. Instead of waiting until the end of the rehearsal period, when the actors have made choices about their characters, Chang allows the culture of the play to seep into the actor's very body as they interact with culturally-specific sets, costumes, music, etc. Chang offers an alternative to dramaturgy packets that are often only used intermittently throughout rehearsals. Instead, the dramaturgy lives in the space for the entire rehearsal period, demanding that actors engage with the culture, history, and lived experiences of the characters they embody.

Finally, Chapter Four, "The Ethnographic Director (Liz Diamond): Radical Collaboration within Culturally-Specific Texts," considers how an artist can competently direct a text that falls outside a director's lived cultural experiences. Working from the perspective established in Chapter Three (Chang), that cultural authenticity is a negotiation between research, dramaturgy, and the actors themselves, I engage in a practical analysis of Liz Diamond's work on playwright Suzan-Lori Parks' *Father Comes Homes From the Wars,* staged at Yale Repertory Theatre in 2018. In order to competently engage with Parks' script about slavery and the Black experience, Diamond (a white director) creates a room of radical collaboration. I have drawn from ethnographic methodologies articulated by Soyini Madison, "active thinking" and "sympathetic listening,"[131] to clarify the significance of these taken for granted activities. I propose that, in fact, the director's ability to listen and respond, much like acting, is a craft in itself. Diamond offers a case study in how these seemingly simple techniques allow a director to competently approach working with a text that does not reflect their own experience. By establishing a cooperative model of leadership that privileges the perspectives of her artistic collaborators, Diamond is able to reconcile her own subjectivity and avoids reproducing her own whiteness.

In preparation for this chapter, I attended six full day rehearsals (6 hours) at Yale Repertory Theatre, observing Diamond's direction of *Father Comes Home From the Wars*. My observations lasted five weeks (February 5-March 6, 2018), attending two days during the first week, two days during the third week, and two days during the fifth week (before tech) of rehearsals. In addition, I attended the performance on the last weekend of the run, on April 4, 2018 and interviewed Diamond the next day on April 5, 2018. I close my project with Diamond as an expression of thanks for so thoroughly inviting me into her process. Moreover, in charting

[131] Soyini D. Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012), 32.

the ark of my project, I want to return to a foundational method of theater: communication and collaboration. In my view, a lack of transparency, the inability to decenter one's own thoughts, experiences, and beliefs, and disparaging remarks and comments account for many of the grievance's actors have raised against directors. I believe that effective communication and collaboration amongst actors and directors is only achieved when the director is able to apply empathy, create a container where vulnerability is safely explored, and with the acknowledgement that the actor's body is a vehicle for the script, making it a site of profound cultural, historical, and political exchanges. In other words, in order to effectively collaborate, a director must already be proficient in the methods I have explored in previous chapters.

Cumulatively these four case studies bring to the fore directorial methods that resist oppressive leadership practices. Through my own theorization of these director's methods, I hope to articulate a directorial praxis that understands *why* inclusive, ethical, and I dare say feminist directing methodologies allow for more expansive, flexible, and culturally competent art-making.

Collaboration has long been touted as an ideal way to resist the artistic supremacy of any one artist. In Robert Benedetti's 1985 book, *The Director at Work,* Zelda Fichandler says: "We have to teach ourselves and each other the art of collaboration, 'co-laboring' in order to express a collective consciousness – the fundamental act of making theatre. In the rehearsal process, in the heat of the opposing viewpoints, the right way is found. However, in the end, talking and working together is not enough. It's necessary to do more, to internalize one another's viewpoints, to think as ourselves and also as the others, to permit the perceptions and needs and priorities of the others to mingle with our own while preserving separateness."[132] In 1950,

[132] Zelda Fichandler quoted in *Women Stage Directors Speak: Exploring the Influence of Gender on Their Work* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2000), 93.

Fichandler co-founded Arena Stage in Washington DC. Fichandler states she ended up directing "…because someone had to, because one person couldn't [direct] them all."[133] Fichandler's sophisticated ideologies surrounding collaboration, however, have been somewhat subverted in the actual *doing* of directing. Fichandler was mentored by Margo Jones, a pivotal figure in starting the regional theater movement. In addition, in the 1960s, Arena Stage (under Fichandler's direction) was the first theater to integrate Black and white actors. However, Fichandler quickly found that the simple insertion of black bodies into white western narratives did not do enough to attract African American audiences.

> What we learned from that experiment was that, if we wanted the African-American population of Washington to come, we needed to stage plays that were of immediate interest to them that reflected and refracted their own lives. I don't know why I thought just changing the casting would make things different.[134]

Over 60 years later, theater directors still have difficulty seeing past their own biases and putting into action a more inclusive approach to, not only casting, but the ways in which an actor's body, experiences, and overall personhood can (and should) inform their role. Actors are not simply puppets to move around on stage – despite what Edward Gordon Craig has said.[135] It is my sincere hope that the methodologies I include here demonstrate (in non-prescriptive terms) how a director can responsibly work with actors and resist perpetuating their own cultural biases.

It is important to note that this project does not purport to decisively chronicle in totality how each of these directors direct. I acknowledge that rehearsal rooms are constantly changing. Several mitigating factors – including an actor's mood – may change how a director approaches

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[133] Fichandler qtd. in *American Women Stage Directors*, 160.
[134] Fichandler qtd. in *American Women Stage Directors*, 160.
[135] Edward Gordon Craig was the brother of director, Edith Craig. While Edith Craig received very little public attention for her directing, preferring to do the work instead of writing about it, Edward was one of the first directors to theorize the craft of directing. He wrote several notable books that perpetuate the idea that the actor is a mere puppet to the director's ideas. (*Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage*, 180)

rehearsal on any given day. In other words, a director's style may change from project to project. In many ways, the lack of directorial standardizations is by design. As Peter Brook asserts in *The Empty Space* (1968), "Every work has its own style: it could not be otherwise: every period has its own style. The moment we try to pinpoint this style we are lost."[136] I believe that the best any director can do is develop a genuine investment in collaborative and equitable practices, equip themselves with the tools to implement these practices, and then try to stay flexible and grounded for whatever else may come.

[136] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 15.

MANAGING PERSONALITIES, CULTIVATING SPECULATION: LEIGH SILVERMAN AND *HURRICANE DIANE*

I mean, I think that there are ways in which living inside of a patriarchy has actually served female directors quite well. I think we've learned all kinds of management skills from a very young age that I think boys, and then men, have not because so many more things are just assumed and given for men…I think that we are socialized to make people comfortable, to put other people's needs in front of our own.[137] – Leigh Silverman

On January 24, 2019, I observed Leigh Silverman in rehearsal for her then upcoming New York Theatre Workshop[138] production of Madeleine George's *Hurricane Diane.* The rehearsal took place in NYTW's third floor rehearsal space and as I took my seat, I noticed that the room was intentionally set-up for the actors' comfort. A large table was positioned next to the break room, making it easy for actors to slip in and out of the rehearsal to use the bathroom or grab a refreshment. Becca Blackwell, who plays the titular role, Diane, and prefers the pronoun "they," walked in with their dog "Horsey" and set up Horsey's bed and toys, almost ritualistically. It was clear that Horsey had been here before. Silverman arrived shortly before 10:00 AM, opened the door swiftly, and said, "Ew, it's raining." She then looked at her stage manager and said, "…this is a masterclass in making an entrance." Immediately, the room erupted into laughter. Before Silverman took her seat (or even put down her belongings), she greeted each collaborator in the room, asking questions. She asked one actor how her child was adjusting being back at school after the teacher's strike. To another, she commiserated about navigating the subway. And, remembering that her assistant director, Miranda Haymon, recently saw *Hamilton*, she asked her what she thought of it. At 10:06 she asked, "Would you like to go from the end so we remember our places?"[139] As the actors got into position, Silverman noticed

[137] Leigh Silverman, interview by author, January 24, 2019.
All subsequent "Silverman interview" citations refer to this interview.
[138] This production was co-produced by The Women's Project: https://wptheater.org/
[139] *Hurricane Diane* rehearsal observation, New York Theatre Workshop, New York, January 24, 2019.

the new coffee mugs on the set and joked to one of the actors, "I feel like the whole character pops into place with these mug choices…so don't worry too much about the acting."[140] In my notebook I wrote, "Silverman makes everyone feel comfortable."

During my observations, I jotted down several notes regarding her use of humor, improvisation, and commitment to making space for individual actor processes to unfold. Silverman would sometimes sit back, allowing actors to work out a scene themselves, only interjecting when she was specifically asked a question. At other moments, Silverman's body was fully activated. She moved about the space encouraging actors from the sidelines, stopping frequently to interrogate each line of text. Silverman seemed to intuit how to best support her actors as they worked through the material. Sometimes she held back, other times she challenged actors. She gave notes sparingly, instead allowing space for her actors to talk to one another about moments that were or were not connecting. Her interaction with actors was about providing a certain amount of freedom and comfort to explore their characters, even as the opening date loomed.

In preparing for my interview with Silverman later that evening, I had remembered a talk she gave at the Drama League in 2018 titled "In Conversation: Designing *The Lifespan of a Fact*," where she said directing was about "managing personalities." During our interview, I asked if she could translate that sentiment into a technique or methodology, noting that the idea of responding to different personalities felt very embedded in her rehearsal room culture. In response to my question, she said:

> There are all kinds of ways in which I think women understand how to make a room feel comfortable. I would also say that because for men there's an authority that's just assumed when they walk into a room. The way that women lead and how they learn how to lead is really different than the way that men learn how to lead, and at least for me, I believe that

All subsequent "*Hurricane Diane* rehearsal" citations refer to this date of observation.
[140] Ibid.

> a huge part of the management side of what I do and the leadership side of what I do are very much related to the type of room that I want to have. The type of room that I believe makes people feel free and creative and open…I think in a way it's why women make better directors. [141]

Silverman suggests that women make better directors because they have been socialized to make people feel comfortable. While men's authority may be assumed, allowing them to conduct a room without quite as much regard for others' comfort, Silverman asserts that in surviving the patriarchy, women have had to develop "all kinds of management skills from a very young age"[142] that boys and men have not. In this statement, Silverman acknowledges that as a director, much of her work is about responding to the needs of actors in order to elicit the most effective performance. While some directors continue to practice their craft in the authoritarian way that has historically characterized the discipline, many directors (like Silverman) have moved toward a model that acknowledges the collaborative nature of theater itself, embracing the real need for directors to be cognizant of how they respond to and treat their actors. In the new model, how a director treats their actors is part of their overall directing methodology; how they treat their actors will be embedded in the work.

As Silverman asserts, men's authority in the room is often naturalized, whereas women must (sometimes) effectively cajole their actors. These gendered distinctions regarding leadership expectations have problematic implications. As Erin Hurley states in *Theatre and Feeling*, the cultural hierarchy of male over female, white above black, and mind over body only serves to maintain that "women and people of colour are more 'naturally' 'feeling' creatures…"[143] As Hurley argues, a cultural hierarchy that values white masculinity often masquerades as putting "reason" before emotion. In valuing reason over emotion, directors are

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[141] Silverman interview.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Erin Hurley, *Theatre & Feeling* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 17.

often able to justify their own artistic choices as reasonable and objective when making decisions that actors may not agree with, or even feel comfortable with. When women practice power differently, i.e. use emotions to nurture other artists in the room, this nurturing quality is regarded as an "innate" trait versus a strategic (reason-driven) methodology being employed to elicit a specific response.

Silverman's contention that women are better at "managing personalities" evokes what Arlie Russel Hochschild defines as "emotional labor." Hochschild's seminal text, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, describes the application of emotional labor as being able to "induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others…"[144] In other words, in applying emotional labor one can productively manipulate a situation so that other people feel what you want them to feel. Hochschild argues that, historically speaking, the demand to perform emotional labor has been disproportionately placed on women as a contingency to their entrance into the labor field. As Hochschild states, "As a matter of tradition, emotion management has been better understood and more often used by women as one of the offerings they trade for economic support."[145] Simply put, emotional labor is a learned skill often employed by women as a means of survival.

While Silverman's assertion that women make better directors *because* they are able to make people feel comfortable could be interpreted as essentialist thinking, Silverman is actually getting at something very important. In identifying that the care and attention she puts towards interpersonal relationships has been shaped by her navigation of the dominant culture, Silverman provides evidence that her process can be *learned*. While women and other marginalized

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[144] Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 7.
[145] Ibid., 20.

individuals have been required to learn how to make others feel comfortable in order to navigate oppression in their day to day lives, these "comfort-making" skills can be learned and incorporated into a pedagogical process that is not necessarily inherent in women. In short, *white cis men can learn them too.*

As a facilit*auteur*, a director who privileges the needs of others, Silverman values making other people feel comfortable because she knows that ultimately a comfortable room allows the artists she works with to be "creative and open."[146] She identifies making others feel comfortable as a necessary component of her directorial process. Taking this value as a given, my concern in this chapter is not emotional labor itself, but how one can learn to predict when and what sort of emotional labor (or other response) should be applied. Part of making a room feel comfortable is predicting the outcome of one's actions in an instant. In responding to actors' needs specifically, a facilit*auteur* must hone their ability to speculate.

Although I only observed one day of Silverman's rehearsal for *Hurricane Diane,* her attention to the needs of actors and the overall production was palpable. Silverman was able to form quick responses in the moment based on what she determined would most effectively support her actors. Sometimes she speculated that her actors needed ambiguity, facilitating unencumbered character explorations. At other times she speculated that what her actors needed was to be challenged, pushing them to engage with the uncomfortable. This chapter, then, untangles the concepts of a director's "intuition," arguing that intuition is a learned strategy developed through practice.

Putting Silverman's rehearsal techniques in conversation with cognitive science and feminist theory, I interrogate the ways in which a facilit*auteur* can cultivate speculation through

[146] Silverman interview.

an empathetic framework. Speculation, informed by empathy, is a valuable directing process that in many ways precipitates the application of all other methodologies. In other words, employing speculation allows facilit*auteurs* to intuitively determine what directorial response should be applied in any given circumstance, creating a comfortable room that allows for productive creativity.

Leigh Silverman

Something I think about a lot is how a room will look and feel. If any part of that room makes me uncomfortable, then I know that I can't do it...That kind of intentionality is just really important to me.[147] – Leigh Silverman

In our interview, Silverman states that she has always been interested in collaboration, which has significantly influenced her education and her subsequent directing projects. As a collaborative artist, Silverman favors directing new plays. Nurturing playwrights allows Silverman to approach each production with the expectation that she will have a say in its development. Throughout her career, Silverman has sought out rehearsal rooms where she is able to foster collaboration in every facet of the production process. When she encounters artists that do not share these same values, she tends to walk away from the project. As she says, "That's the other thing about new work is that there's frequently a moment where everybody looks at each other and it's just not a love match."[148]

Silverman earned a BFA in Directing and an MFA in Playwriting, noting that she "wanted to learn how to work on new plays and work with playwrights."[149] As she states, "…my reason for being is because of my relationship with writers. I don't have a lot of interest in directing when there's not a writer there."[150] Following graduation in 1996, Silverman served as

[147] Silverman interview.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Victoria Myers, "The Once and Future Leigh Silverman: A Western," *The Interval,* June 6, 2015.
[150] Silverman interview.

a production assistant on the national tour for *Rent*[151] and later interned at the New York Theatre Workshop. At NYTW, Silverman was able to observe directors interested in making work collaboratively. In reference to her work at non-profit theaters like NYTW, she says, "The theater is doing the play because they're interested in the artists that are involved in making the play."[152] This "interest in the artists" has served as the foundation for the room Silverman creates, even when directing on Broadway. In discussing directing for larger commercial theaters, such as her groundbreaking 2018 production of *Lifespan of a Fact* at Studio 54, where Silverman employed an all-female design team, she says, "It's like the job is exactly the same and everything around it is different." Silverman notes that despite the celebrity actors, a bigger budget, and more collaborators (read: producers) in the room, "the energy is still the same…it's important that the actors are comfortable."[153]

Silverman has fostered several longstanding and notable collaborations with playwrights including Lisa Kron, Jeanine Tesori, David Henry Hwang, Ethan Lipton, and David Greenspan.[154] In our interview, Silverman indicates that she develops and maintains longstanding collaborators based on how they treat her and her actors:

> I feel lucky in the sense that I've had some and continue to have really amazing collaborations with the same writers over and over…every time you work with someone, it gets, the collaboration deepens…We have more of a shorthand, we're more honest…We have more experience being in the trenches. If that person wants to be in the trenches with you again, it's such a compliment…when the collaboration has gone south – and sometimes it goes south – the production is still okay, but I don't work with that person again. For me, it's about how hard do people want to work? How honest are they willing to be with themselves? When you're in that moment where inevitably you both are just awash in humiliation, how do you deal with that with each other? When there's somebody who handles it badly, takes it out on the actors, takes it out on an innocent bystander, takes it out on me, you know, I can't tolerate it.[155]

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[151] Diep Tran, "The Inexhaustible Leigh Silverman," *American Theatre*, February 1, 2019.
[152] Silverman interview.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Tran, "The Inexhaustible Leigh Silverman."
[155] Silverman interview.

In many ways, Silverman has honed how she treats actors into a directing methodology, predicting the most effective ways she, as director, can support her actors. In "The Inexhaustible Leigh Silverman," interviewed actor Cherry Jones (*The Lifespan of a Fact)* says that Silverman has a distinct way of responding to actors. "The way she works with actors is unique to my experience…She really gives you a tremendous amount of room to play, and always manages to drop in what you need to hear and what you're most missing in such a way that you hardly even know you've been given that direction."[156]

In many ways, Silverman has had to cultivate collaborative methodologies so that playwrights will want to continue to work with her. In the *New York Times* article, "Why Female Directors are Broadway's Smallest," producer David Stone says, "Directors are not chosen for their gender; they're not even necessarily chosen for their credits. More often, the writer and producer select a director because of their previous personal or professional history together and the knowledge that they are copacetic in the rehearsal room and share a similar aesthetic."[157] That is, producers and writers tend to want to work with someone they already know and trust (they're "copacetic") and who has a track record of producing good work. In this same article, Carole Rothman, Artistic Director and Co-Founder of the off-Broadway theater, Second Stage, mentions that there is an "old boys club" that perpetuates the hiring of male directors for "major star-studded revivals destined for Broadway." As Rothman asserts, this "old boys club" acts as a barrier to women entering the field. Even as the culture of theater shifts to be more inclusive, the insular quality of theater locks in (so to speak) a previous cycle of sexism.

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[156] Tran, "The Inexhaustible Leigh Silverman."

[157] David Stone quoted in "Why Female Directors Are Broadway's Smallest," *New York Times.* December 11, 2005. Rothman questions why this "old boys club" exists and posits that the answer may include "A lack of critical mass; old-school cronyism; inertia; few professional training programs and fewer mentors; tolerance for merely adequate male directors; women who do have power but don't use it to hire women as directors."

Silverman states that she has never had any assumptions that anyone would hire her. "I have to say, I never really thought anyone would hire me. Ever…[Yet] I have worked some years with only two or three days off total in a whole year. I have been tireless."[158] However, she maintains that working tirelessly in conjunction with creating a room that artists want to work in has helped her sustain a career.

Perhaps the best example of this is with her first big break: the production of Lisa Kron's *Well.* In 1998, Lisa Kron approached Silverman to stage a reading of a short play she was working on titled *The Contents of Mildred's Purse*.[159] Kron told Silverman, "I burn through directors, but I'm about to start a new piece. Do you want to work on it with me?"[160] Kron warned Silverman that if the production was eventually professionally mounted, a more experienced director would step in. In an interview with Paulette Marty, Silverman describes being told by Kron after every reading for the first four years that "This is the last time you're going to direct it."[161] After working with Kron for over five years on the play, it eventually developed into *Well*, which had its premiere at New York Public Theater in 2004 and opened on Broadway in 2006 with Silverman still in the role of director.[162]

In talking about her directing process, Silverman states that the way she collaborates with actors feels "very fluid in the moment:"

> I have to say that at this point in my career, it feels very intuitive. I think that that intuition comes from years and years of practice. I know that they're the result of years of cutting conversation off too soon or too late or feeling like I shouldn't interject. Then having to retrain myself to feeling like, "Oh, no, no, no. That's my job."[163]

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[158] Silverman interview.
[159] Winter Miller, "All's Well That Ends in Well: Lisa Kron and Leigh Silverman," *The Brooklyn Rail,* April 2006.
[160] Dany Margolies, "How 'Soft Power' director Leigh Silverman has built her theatrical village," *Time Out,* May 1, 2018.
[161] Paulette Marty, *Contemporary Women Stage Directors: Conversations on Craft* (London: Methuen Drama, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 184.
[162] Margolies, "Soft Power' director Leigh Silverman."
[163] Silverman interview.

As an ideal subject for this chapter, Silverman recognizes that there is a productive tension between how she has been conditioned to make others feel comfortable and the ways in which she has had to train herself to be assertive in the rehearsal room. As Silverman states, learning when to interject in actor conversations demanded that she "retrain" herself – to unlearn some of her conditioning. At the same time, she acknowledges that she mines this conditioning for useful collaborative directing techniques. Within this push and pull of unlearning and learning behaviors, Silverman has developed a directing practice that she says feels very "intuitive." As Silverman demonstrates, developing a directorial intuition demands becoming aware of one's unconscious behaviors in order to develop conscious behaviors that will eventually become unconscious again.

Practice Makes Perfect: Developing Intuition

I think that it's one of the things that's hardest about directing is that you need to practice to get good at it and then in order to get the practice, you have to already be good at it.[164]
– Leigh Silverman

Madeleine George's *Hurricane Diane* is about four New Jersey housewives who find themselves at the epicenter of the Greek god Dionysus' attempted return to power. Dionysus appears as a transgender permaculture gardener, Diane, who attempts to seduce four housewives out of their manicured lawns and into her harem. Diane eventually convinces all but one woman – the very uptight and unhappily married Carol Fleischer – to ditch the cul-de-sac and join her sexually charged environmental revolution. The play ends with a determined Carol passionately eulogizing her hermetically sealed lifestyle, favoring pristine appearances over her own happiness. For Carol, and indeed humanity, any discomfort associated with change is not worth it. Meanwhile, Dionysus, aka Diane, continues her quest to engage people – specifically women

[164] Silverman interview.

– in environmentalism, an act that will change the world. The *New York Times* described the play as an amalgamation of "ancient myth, lesbian pulp, ecological thriller and The Real Housewives of Monmouth County…"[165]

During the *Hurricane Diane* rehearsal I observed, the comfortable tone Silverman set when she walked into the room continued throughout the day. In many ways the rehearsal felt very informal. At the same time, Silverman always knew when it was time for a break (without prompting from her stage manager), making it evident that she was meticulously on-task with her schedule. As the actors worked through the first scene, Silverman watched intently but never interjected as the actors stopped and started. The actors often paused as they tried to remember their line or to discuss a reaction or staging they wanted to try between themselves. Silverman took minimal notes, and when she did, she was very selective in when to give them. Silverman led by allowing the room to develop organically, providing ample time for exploration and play.

In a *Time Out* interview, Silverman describes her job as knowing "when to be thinking micro and when to be thinking macro" and gently but firmly keeping all the collaborators' ideas coherent and focused on the story.[166] As Silverman states, being able to intuit what an actor, scene, or room needs takes practice. Similar to other disciplines, honing one's craft takes a substantial amount of effort (think Malcolm Gladwell's oversimplified theory of 10,000 hours).[167] At the same time, so much of directing is responding to personalities. Unlike other positions where there might be more straightforward solutions to problems (anytime X occurs,

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[165] Jesse Green, "Review: In 'Hurricane Diane,' the Perfect Storm Hits Suburbia," *New York Times,* February 24, 2019.
[166] Margolies, "Soft Power' director Leigh Silverman."
[167] Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: the Story of Success* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2008). http://cornell.lib.overdrive.com/ContentDetails.htm?ID=34644C53-943A-4F90-AD28-E7B694005EB8

do Y), directing involves dealing with ever-changing variables – including human emotions. As Emily Mann, former Artistic Director of the McCarter Theatre Center, notes:

> No show is ever the same. No room is ever the same. No company is ever the same. Even when you get the same group in a room, they're not the same this year as they were last year. New things have happened to them, new ideas. So-and-so's divorced now. So-and-so has come out. All these different energies of change, and you don't know where they are in their life journey. You've got to stay really alert.[168]

As Mann articulates, each and every second of a director's encounter in the room is different from the next. A director must be able to quickly respond to what they think an actor might need based on the information they are given. This might include applying proven best practices, accommodating an actor's personal work style, being sensitive to an actor's mood, and any other number of factors affecting the environment of the rehearsal room on that particular day. In "staying alert," Mann alludes to a sophisticated process wherein a director takes in all this information and quickly speculates and adjusts their methods to each individual collaborator.

Often this sophisticated process is reduced to being called a director's "eye," "intuition," "instincts," and "gut feelings." Directors have developed these terms to capture fleeting, ephemeral moments in the rehearsal room within this fluid discipline. In trying to extrapolate methodologies behind "gut feelings," director, performance scholar, and environmental activist Adam J. Ledger builds upon the work of creative process scholars Mary-Anne Mace and Tony Ward (2002) and Marion Botella et al. (2013) as well as Mike Radford's article "Emotion and Creativity" (2004) to assert that the director, as artist, does more than simply problem-solve, calculating "answers to problems in order to display performative data."[169] Instead, as Ledger argues, "we should consider the director as, crucially, a human artist engaged in an iterative

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[168] Emily Mann, interview by author, February 25, 2019.

[169] Adam Ledger, *The Director and Directing: Craft, Process and Aesthetic in Contemporary Theatre* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2019).

process of responding to what is created, in order continually to craft in terms of a still emerging outcome."[170] In other words, a director's job is to respond to a slippery creative process wherein problem-solving and conversation are ongoing. Artistic choices that may have been set in one moment can change in another when unforeseen factors present themselves. As Ledger asserts, responding to these factors is part of the craft, and the craft is continuous.

Much like Mann, Ledger suggests that gut feelings often stand in for a more complicated creative process that includes personality, aesthetic sensibilities, the capacity to perceive emotions, and the time and place wherein all these factors occur. In recognizing that gut feelings are a combination of one's personal experiences and aesthetics, as well as one's ability to perceive emotions in any given moment, I argue that facilit*auteurs* can be cognizant of how they cultivate their intuitive process. Unlike the more prevalent unconscious learning model that seems to indicate that a director is either good at collaborating or not, Ledger's deconstruction of the director's "creative schema" demonstrates that gut feelings result from how a director processes, responds to, and (de)centers their own perspective with respect to information.

There is little debate that practice precipitates the development of automatic responses. In *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells Us About Performance*, Rick Kemp uses cognitive science to demonstrate the ways in which practice is internalized by actors. Kemp discusses how an actor's blocking (or staging) can be rehearsed to the point of becoming muscle memory. Kemp outlines how an actor can "make voluntary actions"[171] (i.e., staging) "*appear* involuntary and therefore spontaneous."[172] As Kemp asserts, an actor's actions seem spontaneous in performance, but in actuality they have been practiced to the point of appearing intuitive. Actors

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[170] Ledger, *The Director and Directing,* 20.
[171] Rick Kemp, *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Performance* (London: Routledge, 2012), 32.
[172] Ibid.

achieve this seemingly organic movement by assimilating staging to the point where its mechanics are engaged automatically.

Kemp demonstrates that automatic responses involve repetition. Through practice, an actor can effortlessly recall staging and dialogue. However, acting is more than robotic repetition; it involves responding to action in the moment. Actors shape their characters – movements, actions, mannerisms – through speculation. In building characters, actors take in information from the script, mine their own experiences, and research the experiences of others. From this information, actors guess (in a manner of speaking) how their character would react to the given circumstances of the play. Through practice and a sense of understanding of the character, actors are able to navigate the liveness of theater, responding to a missed line or forgotten prop while staying in character.

This same sort of cognitive "muscle memory" can be aptly applied to directors. Directors, like actors, are engaged in a repetitive rehearsal process. A director might encounter the same scene over a dozen times before opening night. Like an actor, they are looking at the characters through a speculative process. In effect, they are doing the same cognitive work as the actor, only from the outside in. I might be in rehearsal and know (through my past experiences as a director) that a certain choice in a scene is the most interesting choice. In other words, my previous work in the rehearsal room and on other plays allows me to (sometimes) unconsciously intuit an action that will make a scene stronger. However, as a facilit*auteur*, I have learned (through practice) that actors internalize their choices more readily and with more agency if they discover their choices themselves. Therefore, as Mann asserts, a director must "stay alert"[173] and

[173] Emily Mann, interview by author, February 25, 2019.

intuit not only the artistic needs of a scene (or of individual characters) but, perhaps most importantly, the artistic needs of the actor portraying the character.

In Silverman's rehearsal room, for example, there were moments when Silverman seemed to be holding back notes from her actors in order to let them explore their characters. The actor playing Carol Fleischer asks Silverman if her voice is getting "too tight."[174] Silverman says she thinks it is. Silverman, hearing the frustration in the actor's voice, engages in a discussion about *why* her voice is getting tight. Silverman debates the stakes of the scene with the actor – all of the daily annoyances her character has to deal with. At the same time, she asks the actor playing Carole what she likes about these annoyances (or luxuries), saying, "I feel like your transformation will feel like a much bigger event if it doesn't feel like you are about to lose your mind."[175]

In this moment, Silverman speculates that the actor is too caught up in the tension of the scene. Silverman believes the scene will be more powerful if the character's transformation is a choice rather than an anxiety-fueled break. Through her directing practice, Silverman intuits that simply giving that note in the moment will not be enough to fully satisfy the actor. Her intuition tells her instead that the actor will best respond if Silverman makes space for a hearty discussion. As Silverman asserts:

> Knowing what to say when is such a big part of the craft. When someone's flipping out and knowing whether you have to say, "Do it anyway," because you know at the other side they're going to be glad that you did. Or, if you say, "That's okay. You don't have to do that." Knowing what to do in that moment, how to push it, how far to push it. Is right after dress rehearsal the best time to give a bunch of notes? Maybe it is. Maybe it's not. Every process is different, every actor is different.

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[174] *Hurricane Diane* rehearsal.
[175] Ibid.

It is important to note that seconds after the actor and Silverman engaged in a thoughtful discussion about the actor's motivations, the actor asked Silverman if her character "likes or dislikes Diane's garden concept" – adding, "or is this a playwright question?"[176] Silverman responded definitively: "You do not like it." In this moment, for this question, Silverman intuited that the actor was seeking a quick response; she intuited that discussing her character's feelings towards the garden was not something the actor needed in order to motivate her character.

In this way, the facilit*auteur'*s intuition is applied not only to character work, as Kemp describes, but to the actor's needs and, going further, the needs of the room. This is perhaps what differentiates a director from a facilit*auteur* – or, someone who has practiced their craft to the point of being an expert: they see everything. As Silverman demonstrated, there were moments she would break from her discussion with one actor to tell another actor that she "saw them" and to encourage them to continue to find their character even in the moments they felt like a "prop." She adeptly switched her attention to actors in the room when she speculated they needed it.

In *Toward a General Theory of Acting: Cognitive Science and Performance,* John Lutterbie asserts that acting is a combination of repetition and critical thinking. Lutterbie distinguishes an "expert" actor from a novice or beginner as having "the ability to respond 'intuitively,' that is, without the need to go through an analytical process."[177] However, he acknowledges that this analytical process precedes intuition. Once the analytical process becomes a learned technique, it appears intuitive:

> *When things are proceeding normally, experts don't solve problems and don't make decisions; they do what normally works* [italics in original]…An expert performer still needs to concentrate…focus and attention are necessary if she is to adjust to changing

[176] Ibid.

[177] John Harry Lutterbie, *Toward a General Theory of Acting: Cognitive Science and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 12.

> circumstances. These abilities are not "natural" but are learned techniques that have become "second nature" through repetition.[178]

As Lutterbie indicates, thinking intuitively does not exclude critical thinking. Critical thinking is embedded within the expert actor's automatic response.

Using a similar framework, director Anne Bogart defines the ways directors use intuition as an amalgam of impulse (as a set of automatic responses) with reasoning. As she says, "Intuition…is a process that allows you to know something directly without analytic reasoning, bridging the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind…"[179] This same link between practice and intuition has been echoed at length by other directors I have interviewed. Director and playwright Leigh Fondakowski says that developing a "directorial eye is in the practice…You direct, and you make mistakes, and you create a body of work and that's how you get better at it."[180] Chair of the David Geffen School of Drama's Acting Program and Co-Artistic Director of Working Theater,[181] Tamilla Woodard adheres to the adage "practice makes perfect. The more you practice a thing, the better you are at it."[182] Liz Diamond echoes Woodard: "practice makes perfect. You develop certain fluencies and you begin to understand what things are going to take time, what things are going to be the problem..."[183] And, Emily Mann notes, "How many hours do you need to really learn what you're doing?... I've got 150, 200 new plays under my belt. It just takes experience."[184]

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[178] Ibid., 13.
[179] Anne Bogart, *What's the Story: Essays about Art, Theater and Storytelling* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 57.
[180] Leigh Fondakowski, interview by author, April 9, 2019.
[181] American Theatre Editors, "Tamilla Woodard Named Chair of Yale School Acting Department," *American Theatre,* April 13, 2021.
[182] Tamilla Woodard, interview by author, February 10, 2018.
[183] Liz Diamond, interview by author, April 5, 2018.
[184] Emily Mann, interview by author, February 25, 2019.

Experience and practice allow for the analytical reasoning process, simply put, to go much faster. At the same time, Bogart acknowledges that directing involves processes that could be categorized as more sensorial or innate, what she calls "impulses." "Impulse is different from intuition," she insists, adding "Impulses tend to be automatic, instinctive and self-protective." [185] Rhodessa Jones, Co-Artistic Director of Cultural Odyssey and Founder and Artistic Director of The Medea Project, for example, says her directing process is "very organic…I have to trust instinct and trust spirit…what I am feeling, what's coming down."[186] Ledger's creative schema also gestures toward these less quantifiable characteristics. Ledger defines these more innate qualities as "individualistic and interpersonal traits," "emotional awareness," and a "strong personal value system."[187] Bogart, Jones, and Ledger use different language to describe a set of embodied responses that I call an ability to sense something from within – and these seemingly instinctual, involuntary processes are somewhat malleable.

The unconscious part of the mind is often thought of as the automatic response system that determines whether one will "fight or [take] flight" during times of stress. "Fight or flight" is the sympathetic nervous system directing the body's rapid involuntary response to dangerous or stressful situations. "A flash flood of hormones boosts the body's alertness and heart rate, sending extra blood to the muscles."[188] The amygdala, a tiny gland that is part of the limbic system that controls our emotional responses to events, is constantly scanning our environment for danger. When the amygdala receives information that danger is near, we get a boost of adrenaline that helps us respond to stimuli in seconds. In response to traumatic events,

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[185] Bogart, *What's the Story,* 57.
[186] Rhodessa Jones, "Feminist Directions," roundtable, Department of Performing and Media Arts, Cornell University, May 16, 2019.
[187] Ledger, *The Director and Directing,* 20.
[188] Nicoletta Lanese and Scott Dutfield, "Fight or Flight: The Sympathetic Nervous System," Live Science, February 9, 2022.

psychologists have determined five "automatic" responses: Fight/Flight/Freeze/Flop and Friend.[189] Within this fast-paced decision-making process, the brain decides whether the body can win a fight, can outrun the danger, should stay still until the danger passes or figure out a plan, pretend to be dead, or befriend the dangerous person so that the dangerous person will not hurt them. Although it is the body's automatic response system that initiates the body's heightened sense of awareness, the brain is still processing information through a learned database to predict an outcome.

Similar to the realm of affects, emotions, and feelings, there are negotiations between the unconscious and conscious mind. In neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's view, *emotions* are an unconscious response to outside stimuli, whereas *feelings* are how we "register and interpret emotions…feelings begin when emotions rise to awareness, when the state of awareness begins to register consciously in the mind."[190] Feelings extend the reach of emotions, according to Damasio, by "facilitating the planning of novel customized forms of adaptive responses."[191] In short, feelings involve, as Rhonda Blair states in *The Actor, Image, and Action*, "choice and decision-making."[192]

Emotions, in this sense, are raw and unregulated. They are what rise up internally, whereas feelings are the labels we assign to emotions that elicit a recognized response. Using the bear analogy, I see a bear and get scared (an emotion) and realize it is because I don't feel safe (a feeling). Damasio then goes one step further to argue that feelings build culture. In Damasio's view, feelings, such as safety, would motivate individuals to form collectives whereby housing

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[189] Alison Woodward, "How the Brain Works in Response to a Traumatic Event," *Sexual Trauma and Recovery Service,* January 31, 2020.
[190] Antonio Damasio quoted in Rhonda Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience* (London: Routledge, 2008), 68.
[191] Damasio quoted in Blair, 68.
[192] Rhonda Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 55.

becomes a societal rather than an individual responsibility. In short, while emotions may be automatic, we have a choice in how we respond to them.

In terms of directing, the emotion (or automatic response) to an actor who is just "not getting it" might be frustration/anger. There have been many times in my directing career that I am just plain frustrated that an actor has reached the end of the rehearsal process and is still reluctantly or half-heartedly embodying their character. As a facilit*auteur*, I know that an unbridled response to my frustration won't do anyone any good. This is perhaps what the response would have been from theater's "sacred monsters" outlined in my introduction. Instead, I acknowledge my emotion and activate what Blair calls, "choice and decision-making." I may take time to make this choice or, if I have encountered this issue enough times, I may simply intuit a rational response. Either way, the facilit*auteur* takes care to cultivate a self-awareness of their emotional responses so that they can turn them into a productive decision-making process.

In *Theatre & Feeling,* Erin Hurley ascribes the term "affect" to what Damasio defines as "emotions." "Affect makes itself known through automatic reactions, such as sexual arousal or sweating; thus, affects are sets of muscular and/or glandular responses."[193] Hurley says that "Affect is unruly that way; it exceeds us by happening against our will"[194] and goes on to note that affect is beyond our control and is communicated through an emotional display (facial and bodily expressions). Hurley defines "emotions" through Sara Ahmed's *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, stating that "emotions are relational."[195] Using Ahmed's allegory of a person encountering a bear and then feeling fear, Hurley argues that emotions (in this instance, fear) are

[193] Hurley, *Theatre & Feeling,* 13.
[194] Ibid., 14.
[195] Ibid., 20.

"discovered in the person's relation to the bear and the bear's to the person."[196] In this sense, emotions are a "negotiation" between the self and outside stimuli.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, Silverman asserts that women make better directors because they have been conditioned to make people feel comfortable. Silverman's theory about gendered differences between directors reveals something about the biases directors bring into the room based on their own experiences of moving through the world – these experiences, similar to practicing one's craft, become a set of "innate" values that we are almost hardwired to maintain.

Rhonda Blair asserts that how we construct our sense of identity is through the "dynamic interaction between the body and the environment…."[197] Blair claims that cognitive neuroscience has some similarities to the position of scholars such as Judith Butler who describe identity as a purely social construction. Blair attributes "semantic categories of social values" and the "dominant cultural metaphors with which we are raised"[198] to how individuals form their sense of self. As she states, who we are depends on our cultural and linguistic interpretation of experiences. In short, the narrative that we construct about ourselves is influenced and interpreted through a set of cultural values.

Blair notes that culture is "conditioned and variable," warning actors and acting teachers to be wary of assigning presumptions of "truthfulness" or "universality" to a particular "linguistic, cultural, or personal framework."[199] In this way, one can think of innate emotions as stemming from a set of experiences. I may feel fear seeing a bear in the woods only because I live in a city and am unfamiliar with bears (and woods). As a director, I may feel fear or even

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[196] Ibid.
[197] Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action*, 54.
[198] Ibid., 55.
[199] Ibid., 56.

anger when a male actor raises his voice to me. As a woman, I have had men use their raised voice to scare and intimidate me and even when I am in what some consider to be a position of power (as director), my automatic response to this is fear. At the same time, I can acknowledge that the fear I am feeling is a personal bias based on my experiences and consciously develop new responses that are appropriate to the rehearsal room.

According to Blair, culture and biology intersect in the body. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity demonstrates the ways in which the body can be manipulated through conditioning. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler writes:

> The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to a world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own.[200]

Butler theorizes that gender is formed through social conditioning. People identifiy a body marked male and begin to enculturate that body with "male" values, informing how the body will move, act, and respond to stimuli. This type of enculturation can be thought of as the "unconscious mind." Butler asserts that, for the most part, this process happens without an awareness from the subject that it is happening. Only when bodies fall outside of this biologically-based categorization are they more consciously persuaded to identify as man or woman in order to be socially recognized and therefore live a "viable life."[201] People whose bodies fall outside of easily identifiable categories are made more conscious of this process of enculturation and may consciously make decisions about how they decide to navigate these norms. Even while one may not have full control over how their body is enculturated, in becoming conscious of how one's identity is formed, one can begin the process (if they so

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[200] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 21.
[201] Ibid.

choose) of unlearning this conditioning. In this way, there is a slipperiness between conscious and unconscious processes. Unconscious processes can become conscious and conscious processes can be practiced to the point of becoming unconscious.

The process of developing the intuitiveness of a facilit*auteur* involves not only becoming conscious of one's own social responses that have been learned over time, but unlearning and relearning other types of responses that best suit the needs of the rehearsal room. Simply knowing how impulse (unconscious) and intuition (conscious) processes are formed does not necessarily result in directors developing a response system that fosters actors' comfort. Depending on how a director is educated, their values, and their lived experiences, a director may still learn that asserting their authority in an oppressive manner will elicit the response they want. A director who learns by results only – if I apply pressure, the actors will learn their lines – may not necessarily consider how the pressure they apply affects the actor.

Sara Ahmed argues that social norms are enforced, in part, by the promise of happiness. There are gendered perceptions of women suggesting that breaking social norms causes unhappiness in others. As this pertains to directing, a woman director who asserts herself in an authoritarian way breaks a social norm that women cannot or should not be assertive. Men, on the other hand, are praised for exhibiting authoritarian traits, thus potentially perpetuating these oppressive tactics.

In Ahmed's example of being a "feminist killjoy,"[202] she recalls a memory of sitting around her family's dinner table. Someone says something problematic, even offensive. Ahmed

[202] Sara Ahmed defines a "killjoy" as a person "willing to go against a social order, which is protected as a moral order, a happiness order is to be willing to cause unhappiness, even if unhappiness is not your cause." In short, a feminist killjoy is willing to cause others unhappiness or discomfort in order to advocate for herself or others. Sara Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects)," *The Scholar and Feminist Online,* Barnard Center for Research on Women, Issue 8.3, Summer 2010.

must now decide whether to speak up or let the tension build inside herself, knowing that if she *does* speak up, she will be categorized as the problem.[203] In navigating a rehearsal room, the question is not *whether* to say something but *how.* What tone of voice should I use? What words should I choose? How insistent should I be? In the *Hurricane Diane* rehearsal room, Silverman oscillated between asking actors to decipher their character through discussions and improvisations and answering questions with direct decisiveness. It all depended on what she felt each actor needed at a given moment.

In moving away from oppressive practices, a director may need to unlearn some of the processes they have practiced, practicing new processes until they too become intuitive. In developing directing methodologies that consider other people's comfort, the unlearning and relearning process involves engaging with empathy.

Empathy as Methodology

I think what you instill in the early part of the process is empathy, trust, and a sense of adventure so that people will feel comfortable when you ask them to take big, uncomfortable leaps. My feeling is that if it's been in the room from the beginning, it will continue to be in the room, even when people are under the most stress.[204] – Leigh Silverman

Throughout Silverman's rehearsal, her acute attention to creating a collegial atmosphere with the actors was evident. She praised her actors: "the temperature of that feels great!" She encouraged ownership: "If this doesn't feel helpful to you, throw it away." And she provided constructive feedback: "I am always going to be interested in stillness from you."[205] When the actors struggled, she changed her approach depending on the needs of the individual, sometimes allowing the actor to work it out themselves and sometimes actively pushing from the sidelines.

[203] Ibid.
[204] Silverman interview.
[205] *Hurricane Diane* rehearsal.

On the day of my observation, Silverman's actors were grappling with clarifying several moments in the play, most notably a conversation where Carol tells the other characters (Renee, Beth, and Pam) about her meeting with the landscaper, Diane. During the dialogue, Carol describes what permaculture is and her disinterest in it. In this scene, each character has a different reaction to Diane's permacultured presence. The actor playing Renee suggested an impromptu improvisation geared towards finding the connection between the characters. Silverman stated, "I hate improv but I'm agreeing to this." The exercise involved the actors creating a shared memory of the last hurricane their characters endured. As the improv proceeded, Silverman asked the actors to answer questions about their family, deepening the imagined shared memory. After twenty minutes, Silverman stopped and asked, "Was that helpful?" She then mined the improv for specific character details, offering clarifying questions and observations. The actors went on to discuss what emerged from the improv with Silverman for another ten minutes. Silverman gave space for the actors to process the improv, debrief, and fold the useful bits into their characters.

In "Notes on Empathy, Cognitive Neuroscience, and Theatre/Education," Rhonda Blair identifies empathy as central to connecting to what the other person is feeling, saying, and doing. In relating empathy to how teachers approach working with students, she says, "As teachers, we need to be empathetic with our students in order to meet them 'where they live.'"[206] Just as Silverman decentered her own interest in improv, Blair asserts that empathy allows instructors to tailor their approach to teaching to the individual needs of students, using empathy to recognize

[206] Rhonda Blair, "Notes on Empathy, Cognitive Neuroscience, and Theatre/Education," p-e-r-f-o-r-m-a-n-c-e.org. November 16, 2015.

exactly what those needs are. Blair further states, "The same is true for directors working with actors,"[207] indicating that empathy allows for a degree of "mind-reading."

Although empathy is frequently equated with compassion, Blair notes that "empathy" can refer to at least eight different things:

> 1) knowing someone's internal state, 2) matching someone's posture or neural responses (neural simulation falls in here), 3) feeling as someone else feels, 4) projecting yourself into someone else's situation, 5) imagining how someone else is thinking and feeling, 6) imagining how you would think and feel in the other person's place, 7) feeling distress at witnessing someone else's suffering, and 8) feeling for someone who is suffering (Batson 4-8). In short, empathy is a generic term applied to a whole array of neural, cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic responses that are evoked in us by an other, who can be real or, crucially for those of us in theatre, imagined.[208]

Blair states that "social neuroscientists ask two basic, very different questions about empathy: 'How can we know what another person is thinking and feeling?' and 'What leads us to respond with sensitivity to the suffering of another?'"[209] Blair cites evolutionary neuroscientists in addressing the first question, suggesting that empathy (as a predictive system) is a survival mechanism that allows humans to predict the behavior of others in order to calculate how best to navigate a variety of situations.[210] This automatic tendency to mimic others' expressions allows us to imagine what the other person is thinking and, more importantly, what they will do. In this way, empathy is an unconscious mechanism related to the "fight or flight" response that engages automatically, encouraging us, as Blair elucidates, to either fight, flight, feed, or fornicate.

I suggest empathy is a crucial element in directors being able to "read the room." In *Social Empathy: The Art of Understanding Others*, Elizabeth Segal describes "interpersonal empathy" as consisting of three distinct dynamics: "mirroring the physiological actions of

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[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience*, 3.
[210] Blair applies the four Fs to this predicative system: fight, flight, feed, fornicate.

another, taking the other's perspective, and while doing so remembering that the experience belongs to the other and is not our own."[211] Blair describes this process as a "Perception-Action Model" of empathy that involves a "bottom-up" processing. First, the body engages in its "automatic tendency to mimic others' expressions." Then, there is a "conscious imaginative placing of oneself into the feeling and thinking of another." Similar to the way emotions move into feelings described earlier, Blair says that moving into the "Perception-Action Model" demands cognitively processing the unconscious information one receives and applying it to trying to understand the emotional state and experiences of others before one takes action. In this way, Silverman's attention to her actors' comfort is facilitated through her ability to perceive what her actors are feeling and respond.

Neuroscientist Hedy Kober calls this predictive response aspect of empathy "the more cognitive part of empathy," characterized by speculation.[212] Kober asserts that speculation goes beyond an unconscious empathetic response system. As she states, speculation is the brain's way of actively processing an empathetic response in conversation with lived experiences in order to theorize what another person is feeling:

> We also theorize and speculate about the meaning of what it is that we're seeing. That's our ability to, maybe interpret is a good word, interpret what it is that we're seeing…neural activity both associated in the parts of experience sharing and parts of the brain that are related to theory of mind, both of them come together to predict how accurate we are. So, accuracy in understanding what someone else is experiencing comes both from resonating in how they're feeling on a more experience sharing level but also from accurately recruiting the parts of our brain that allows us to speculate cognitively and think about what they might be experiencing.[213]

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[211] Elizabeth A. Segal, *Social Empathy: the Art of Understanding Others* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 3.
[212] Anne Bogart and Hedy Kober, "Stories We Tell: Narrative and Empathy," interview, International Festival of Arts & Ideas, September 7, 2016.
[213] Ibid.

According to Kober, speculation is what allows an individual to mine their own experiences to imagine what the other person might be feeling. And, going even further, speculation facilitates a brainstorming of how to determine what might alleviate the other person's suffering even if they have not experienced that same suffering themselves. Segal describes speculation as sharing in another's actions and feelings but at the same time "keep[ing] our own feelings under control."[214] Being able to speculate the needs of others while keeping one's own "feelings under control" is especially important when encountering rehearsal room tension.

As Silverman's rehearsal wore on, the room grew slightly more serious. A bit of the levity wore off and Silverman was less able to accommodate actor requests to re-run scenes or facilitate in-depth discussions about character. After Blackwell ran their opening monologue, Blackwell stated that they still did not feel it was "working." Blackwell stopped during the monologue often, perceiving themselves to be "boring" and struggling to "intensify the interesting bits."[215] Unlike Silverman's work on a previous scene, which she let unfold organically, Silverman pushed Blackwell to work through the scene. In many ways, Silverman occupied the role of scene partner and coached Blackwell, occasionally throwing out words of encouragement: "In that moment you're fucking pissed!" "If this isn't helpful to you throw it away."[216]

When Silverman could not speculate what Blackwell needed, she walked through the scene, mimicking the blocking so that she knew what felt comfortable, what obstacles Blackwell may have been encountering, and problem-solved a solution. When Silverman was engaged with Blackwell one-on-one, the relationship between the two collaborators became much more

[214] Segal, 4. Segal also calls speculation "interpersonal empathy"
[215] *Hurricane Diane* rehearsal.
[216] Ibid.

emotionally salient. By staying focused on Blackwell, Silverman readily mirrored them, gave nods of approval and quietly inserted an encouraging word from the sidelines. Toward the end of the scene, Blackwell asked to run the scene again. Despite the time crunch and Silverman assuring Blackwell that the scene was looking good, she left the choice to repeat the scene in Blackwell's hands, stating, "I'm happy to look at everything."[217] In this way, Silverman put into action a sort of empathy that privileged the needs of Blackwell over the potential time crunch of the production, or at least tried to balance these two demands.

Relying solely on one's unconscious empathy can produce its own hazards. Blair states that "empathic capacity can be reinforced or suppressed…by our experiences."[218] While mining one's experiences can fuel empathy, speculating on how others feel based solely on one's experiential knowledge can also reinforce biases. In "Experiences," Joan Scott cites Marxist historian E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* to illustrate the ways in which one aspect of a person's identity can serve as a lens through which all experiences are viewed. In Thompson's view, workers are all categorized in their relation to production and therefore identify strongest with their class position, which "overrid[es] other kinds of diversity."[219] As someone who has a strong association to my identity-marker "woman," I have found myself occasionally privileging the opinions of other women artists. In these moments, I have to quickly recalibrate my empathetic response. It's almost as if I am taking off my "woman" hat and putting on my "director" hat in order to make clear the identity I am most connected to in the moment. The shift allows me to more readily privilege the needs of my actors – all of them.

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[217] Ibid.
[218] Blair, "Notes on Empathy."
[219] Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 29.

Blair similarly asks that we "be specific about what we mean when we talk about projecting ourselves into or appropriating another's situation."[220] Blair cautions individuals against conflating the feeling of empathy with doing something "authentic." In other words, to use Thompson's example of the working class, although workers might unite under this identity category, and are thus able to empathize with shared working class experiences, there is often a vast different between the experiences of working class men and women, working class white women and BIPOC women, working class cis gendered and transgendered individuals, working class parents and nonparents, and on and on and on.

In this way, speculation demands staying tuned into an actor's emotions but also separating oneself from them enough to determine how to best respond to tension or discomfort. Emily Mann says that stepping back from an emotionally charged situation or from a difficult actor allows her to identify the real feelings at play that are initiating the conflict. For a director, being able to step back to determine how to most effectively move forward demands being able to identify when someone else's emotions or needs are triggering an emotion in one's self.

A common "automatic" response to these types of uncomfortable, chaotic, and uncertain feelings is posturing. As Mann says, "…when I was younger, I had to prove that as a female director or playwright, I knew what I was doing, and so it would take about a week to ten days to make that really clear." Mann says that after she was able to establish herself as the authority in the room, she cleared a path for herself to be able to identify emotions in other people, which she describes as "usually terror, some form of fear" that would inevitably "destroy their own work and other people's in the room."[221] Mann maintains that with time she learned to neutralize the

[220] Blair, "Notes on Empathy."
[221] Emily Mann, interview by author, February 25, 2019.

insecurities that necessitated proving her leadership capabilities, allowing her to more quickly focus her attention on her actors.

As illustrated by Mann, there can be a tendency for early-career directors to feel the need to "prove" their capability. In *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter,* Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement warn women directors against the "jovial, generous, and disabling presence of Big Daddy" especially "in her own head."[222] Within this context, Big Daddy can be described as masculinist ideologies surrounding authority, that voice in any director's head that tells them they should have all the answers.

In many ways, posturing is a response to this internalized "Big Daddy," triggering an alert that says, "I feel out of control, fix this feeling now!" In reaction to one's heightened feelings, the body tries to get itself back to a feeling of normalcy by applying the survival skills it has learned. Informed by one's experiences and learned cultural values, this state of homeostasis varies from person to person.

Like several of the directors I observed, Silverman mitigates any impulse to posture by simply saying, "I don't know." During one particular *Hurricane Diane* scene, the actor playing Renee Shapiro-Epps, who is described as more "chic" and more "cultured than the rest of her cul-de-sac,"[223] appeared to be uncertain about the temperament of her character. She asked Silverman if she was being "too rude?" in regard to her interaction with the other characters. It appeared that Silverman wanted to move on to another scene or simply did not share the same concern as the actor. Instead of saying something to the effect of "we need to move on" or "it's fine." Silverman sat thoughtfully and said, "I don't know…let's look at it." The actors ran the

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[222] Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement, *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as If Gender and Race Matter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 8.
[223] Backstage Casting Notice, "Hurricane Diane," at New York Theatre Workshop, posted October 30, 2018.

scene again while Silverman watched intently. After the scene was completed again in its entirety, Silverman said, "If the emotional attachment is real, then no matter how excited you get is fine."[224] Although nothing much changed in terms of the actor's performance during the additional run, Silverman had speculated that running the scene again would satisfy the actor and keep the rehearsal moving. In this way, Silverman was able to provide comfort to her actor and achieve what she needed for the production without asserting her authority in a domineering way.

In speculating how to address "problems" in the rehearsal room, Silverman asks herself several mitigating questions:

> …if people are upset, if someone's causing a problem or putting up a roadblock in the process, how do I navigate around that? It's like do you humor it? Do you ignore it? You have a bunch of decisions to make and knowing which is the right one has everything to do with where are you in the process. How much pressure is there? What's the temperature? How many people is it affecting? Who's on the receiving end of what's about to happen? Then, making the best decision you possibly can about what it is that you need to achieve.[225]

In deciding what action she will take, Silverman goes through her database of what she knows about the person, the situation, and how she can deliver her decision in a way that it will be best received. Sometimes Silverman must process this information quickly, making an informed intuitive response. Sometimes the problem solving takes more time and Silverman sits with it, deciding her best course of action. As Mann says, "I may not have the immediate solution, but I'm definitely going to take that home and think about it."[226] Silverman maintains that "I feel pretty stable now in my ability to both trust myself and my ability to read the room, to read what discomfort is going to be useful and what discomfort is not useful."[227]

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[224] *Hurricane Diane* rehearsal.
[225] Silverman interview.
[226] Emily Mann, interview by author, February 25, 2019.
[227] Silverman interview.

Discomfort is something Intimacy Director[228] Claire Warden thinks a great deal about. She is careful to distinguish between "comfort" and "safety," noting that discomfort can facilitate growth while an unsafe room is unacceptable. Additionally, she notes that only the actor can decide when a room is indeed "safe." The goal is to create an environment where actors can discuss their boundaries, allowing them to "build up the confidence to move up the discomfort scale."[229] Similar to Warden's discomfort scale, Silverman feels strongly that a productive collaborative relationship involves identifying when discomfort is useful. As she says, "If the problem solving makes for an enormously challenging and delightful and productive experience," she told me "then that to me is the collaboration that I want to have."[230]

For some directors, empathy is an outside-in process. Katie Mitchell provides introductory empathy training in her meticulously detailed handbook, *The Director's Craft.* Chapter Nine, titled "The Initial Few Days of Rehearsal,"[231] focuses on establishing a productive working environment with actors and provides a useful step-by-step approach for giving feedback. Before a director steps into the rehearsal room, Mitchell says, they should make a list regarding their thoughts on each of the actors. As she states, "the thoughts you have in your head about actors when you enter the rehearsal room will dictate how you work with them."[232] Negative words such as "difficult," "demanding," or "frightening" may reveal a director's anxieties about working with actors and therefore create a climate of fear. If words such as

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[228] Colleen Hughes (a certified intimacy director) defines "intimacy direction" as "the codified practice of choreographing moments of stage intimacy in order to create safe, repeatable, and effective storytelling. The Intimacy Director is a movement professional and an actor advocate." https://www.colleenhughes.com/
[229] "Introduction to Intimacy Direction with Claire Warden," workshop, Drama League, October 13, 2019.
[230] Silverman interview.
[231] Katie Mitchell, *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 117.
[232] Ibid.

"special," "artists," and "instinctive" appear, then it is possible a director is over-mystifying the actor's craft and subverting the importance of her own skill.[233]

In writing down one's feelings towards actors, Mitchell asks directors to become conscious of their unconscious biases that could lead to negative automatic responses. Mitchell even recommends that directors pay attention to how they sit while they watch an actor's performance "and ask yourself whether you are sitting in a way that is conducive to their working well."[234] Silverman, for example, leaned forward in her chair, nodded her head in affirmation, and reinforced the actor's choices from her director's chair.

Conclusion

> *I feel like too much of directing is being a sponge so you're absorbing everybody's anxiety and you're holding it and not letting anything leak out. You're moving everybody in one direction. Sometimes that means that they need something from you, some kind of support and you want to give it to them and sometimes you don't want to give it to them and you have to do it anyway.*[235] – Leigh Silverman

Developing intuition takes time. Silverman believes that her "tireless" practice has resulted in her decision-making process feeling "very fluid in the moment."[236] However, within the turbulent, selective art form of directing, which is ripe with discrimination, practice for female directors is often hard to come by. "In order to become good at directing," Silverman grumbles, "one needs practice; however, to get the practice, one needs to already be good at it: There's this real chicken and the egg thing, especially for young directors."[237]

In Fondakowski's experience, gender plays a big role in who is able to develop their process through practice. As she says, she has witnessed her male peers disproportionately

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[233] Ibid., 118.
[234] Ibid., 132.
[235] Silverman interview.
[236] Silverman interview.
[237] Ibid.

receive more opportunities, even after a bad review. As Fondakowski asserts, "I don't think the same can be said for women of my generation, that we're not given those same opportunities and we're not set in the same kind of way… There's a lot more riding on whether it's good or not, and when in the back of your mind you're thinking, 'Well, if it doesn't get a good review, or this isn't good, I'm not going to get hired again,' that's a different kind of pressure that's bearing down."[238]

Fondakowski shared with me:

> I don't want to state it too grossly, but I will say that what I have noticed is that my peers, men in my profession, they're given opportunities to just direct and keep directing, to direct and keep directing and keep directing and keep directing and keep directing. And as you keep directing, you develop your craft. You develop your directorial eye…It goes back to that idea of the intuition versus instinct. You cultivate your instinct by practice, and you cultivate your intuition by building your confidence, right? And you build your confidence by feeling safe, to go out there and do it, right? But if you're getting that message, it's very difficult to calibrate both of those things.[239]

May Adrales, Former Artistic Director of The Lark, says, "I've assisted enough men and observed enough men to understand that when they change their mind or when they lose their temper or if they happen to waffle back and forth, it's okay, but when a woman does it, it seems to stain you. You don't get a second chance."[240] In Adrales' view, men have the opportunity to make mistakes (interpersonal and otherwise) while remaining hirable. Women, on the other hand, are not afforded the same opportunity.

In an interview with Anne Bogart titled "Stories We Tell: Narrative and Empathy," she says that in order to direct, "one thing you have to be able to enjoy is juggling psychologies because you are juggling psychologies of actors, designers, crew and everyone is in a different mood. If you don't enjoy that juggling there's no there *there*. You *have* to be able to do that."[241]

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[238] Leigh Fondakowski, interview by author, April 9, 2019.
[239] Ibid.
[240] May Adrales, interview by author, April 15, 2018.
[241] Anne Bogart and Hedy Kober, interview, "Stories We Tell: Narrative and Empathy," International Festival of Arts & Ideas, September 7, 2016.

In juggling various personalities, the director is invariably responsible for creating a kind of equilibrium in the rehearsal room, attending to the various needs of others. Being able to "juggle personalities" requires the ability to predict human behavior, read emotions, problem-solve, and maintain calm in difficult situations. Being able to intuit when an actor is having a bad day or difficulty with the material is a critical element in knowing how best to proceed.

For Silverman, managing personalities begins on the first day of rehearsal. In our interview, she explains that the first few days of rehearsal allow her to determine how to approach her actors. As she says, "It's a director's really valuable time to get to know, oh, this person really likes to talk a lot or this person really doesn't talk at all. Or this person has a lot of ideas or this person actually has no idea what this play is about. You get a good sense of how people are going to work together."[242] As Silverman indicates, being able to make a room feel comfortable takes preparation, paying attention to other people's behavior, and banking this information for future use. While a director may unconsciously rely on their own experiences to form automatic responses in a rehearsal, a facilit*auteur* consciously and critically develops an intuition through an amalgam of experience, empathy, and critical thinking.

As this chapter illustrates, directors who *value* developing actor-centered directing processes can do so through practice. As Silverman says, "I care very much, not only about the work that I'm making, but how the work gets made." As cognitive scientists demonstrate, reshaping one's value system, learning new information, and having new experiences can actually change the way we think. To demonstrate this point, Rhonda Blair uses the analogy of a door slamming or a gun being fired; over time, the person hearing the noise will be habituated to respond to it less and less. Blair likens habituation to theater training: the more time an actor has

[242] Silverman interview.

to rehearse, the more automatic the performance will be, thus freeing the actor to respond to other forms of spontaneity (a dropped line, a missing prop, etc.). Blair asks, "What happens if we begin to view teaching, training, and rehearsal as a kind of 'brain modification' working on both biological and cultural fronts (at least in the sense that experience modifies the brain)? How does this change our sense of what acting is and the way it might happen most effectively?"[243] Blair's question can be aptly applied to directing training as well. *What if habituating empathy is part of the directing practice?* What if we care as much about *how* the work is made as the work itself? What if we can all be like Silverman and say, the week before tech begins, "sure, let's try it"?

[243] Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action*, 57.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY:
VULNERABILITY, BOUNDARIES, AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS
RHODESSA JONES' TRAUMA-INFORMED THEATER

The opening sequence of The Medea Project's 2018 production, *When Did Your Hands Become a Weapon?* (a collaboration with Women's HIV Program UCSF), began with a group chant:

> I am the pharaoh woman.
> I am the one who hears you when you cry, reaches for you, when your loneliness crushes you.
> When you lead, when you die a little. I am there.
> I am the pharaoh woman.
> Picking up pieces of broken glass as I help you pack a suitcase, finding quarters in the sofa.
> The photo stuffed inside books. The light in your children's faces. The door to the outside world.
> To the inner sanctum. To the grocery store. To the abortion clinic. To the mammogram results. To the funeral of a friend. To the kitchen, the basement, the train tracks.
> The sweat. The shame. You work so hard to bury.
> I am ease, raw, and righteous sister!
> Lusty, truthful, brazen, appalled. I come to rescue you from all that silences you.[244]

As the women said each line, they emerged one by one into the audience, eventually forming a semi-circle in the front of the stage. Some lines were spoken together, some by individuals. Each performer engaged with the audience, looking directly at individual spectators as if to challenge the audience to really *see* them. Shortly after the chant, Rhodessa Jones, the group's founder and artistic director, appeared in the back of the house. Jones descended from the back of the theater in a glittery gown, weaving through the audience as she sang:

> A gypsy told my mother, I'm going to wish you well.
> A gypsy told my mother, you're gonna burn in hell.
> So call on your man, he's buried in the snow.
> Is your son out here taken? Well and then I'll go. Well and then I'll go.[245]

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[244] *When Did Your Hands Become a Weapon?* A collaboration between Rhodessa Jones, the Women's HIV Program UCSF, and The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women, Brava Theater Center, October 27, 2018.
[245] Ibid.

When the song ended, Jones stopped in the center of the audience and said, "Good evening." When no one replied she said, "You can talk to me, good evening."

Jones made a point to look around the room, welcoming patrons she did not know and giving warm waves to the ones she did. She began to speak. As she did, she invoked specific current cultural and political events – the passing of playwright Ntozake Shange, the recent testimony of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, the separation of children from their immigrant parents at the Mexican Border.[246] As she spoke, Jones' tempo increased and her voice rose. The speech turned into an almost prophetic account of a failing world. She linked the obliteration of systems of power with burning bodies and scattered bones. Jones' opening speech was an amalgamation of the immediate and the mythic, the historic and imagined – a mixture of song, gospel, dramatic prose, and straight talk. She seamlessly wove these disparate theatrical forms, sometimes within the same sentence. After the speech's crescendo Jones took a pause and then said, "Thank you all for coming, I'm Rhodessa Jones. I'm responsible for starting all this madness."[247]

After Jones' spectacular opening she retreated to the background, spending much of the production stalking the stage, observing from the sidelines. Jones called the character she was playing "the bloodroot," a plant commonly known in the African diasporic for its medicinal properties. As such, Jones described her character as a healer, always lurking in the background of the production's often tragedy-laden stories, meant to give the teller a sense of hope. In many ways the juxtaposition of Jones' opening speech and her bloodroot character is an allegory for Jones' directing work. She is both the star of the show and member of the chorus; loudly inexorable and quietly supportive; at once an auteur and a facilitator.

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[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.

When Did Your Hands Become a Weapon is about the #MeToo movement. Unlike other Medea Project pieces that have used different myths and fairytales as a catalyst for accessing incarcerated participants' personal stories, this production is very much rooted in the solicitation of narratives that focus on the current political moment. Medea Project participants offered their vulnerable accounts of domestic violence, sex work, and queer identity. These accounts were stitched together like a quilt. Group members took turns telling their own story and then serving as the ensemble – or support – for others.

Although Jones has worked in several directing capacities, she counts The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women and HIV Circle as her life's work.[248] The Medea Project is founded on the raw stories of incarcerated women, formerly-incarcerated women, and women living with HIV. In addition to her role as the Founder and Artistic Director of The Medea Project, Jones serves as the Co-Artistic Director of Cultural Odyssey with her longtime artistic partner, musician Idris Ackamoor. Cultural Odyssey serves as the parent company for The Medea Project, which Jones outlines on her website as "a performance workshop designed to achieve personal and social transformation with incarcerated women and women living with HIV."[249]

Working with incarcerated and recently-incarcerated women, Jones' productions serve as social activism wrapped in intimate stories about personal trauma. As an educator, social activist, performer, and director, Jones is constantly developing and modifying exercises in service of the difficult task of encouraging participants to lay bare their most vulnerable stories. Jones describes The Medea Project as a "public communion," asking herself as she works, "How can

[248] Jean Schiffman, "Activist Performer: Rhodessa Jones," *American Theatre,* November 19, 2019.
[249] The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women, themedeaproject.weebly.com.

this be as holy as possible? How can it be as healing as possible?"[250] Jones says that her role as a director is to continue to question and push the participants so that they are able to make their own discoveries about the stories they offer. Jones tells her participants, "You must have a sense of your own history" in order to "engage in the world."[251] As a facilit*auteur*, Jones is tasked with creating a safe space that allows for the most marginalized of narrators to grapple with and subsequently theatricalize their lived experiences.

Creating this type of trauma-informed theater can be perilous. In "To Witness Mimesis: The Politics, Ethics, and Aesthetics of Testimonial Theatre in *Through the Wire,"* author Caroline Wake debates the ethics of using testimonial theater to recount traumatic experiences.[252] Describing her work with asylum seekers, Wake argues that in soliciting personal narratives there is the risk that participants will be re-traumatized by the "risk of repetition" that manifests in contradictory ways. Citing Alison Jeffers, Wake notes that re-traumatization can occur, for example, because the rehearsal space resembles a bureaucratic space, a site in which participants have already "performed" their testimony for "immigration officials, case workers, lawyers, and so forth."[253]

Julie Salverson notes that the same risks of repetition occur because the rehearsal room also resembles a therapeutic space. In her article "The Art of Witness in Popular Theatre,"

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[250] Rhodessa Jones, interview by author, November 8, 2018.
[251] Jones interview, November 8, 2018.
[252] Testimonial theater (similar to community-based theater) is often defined through the process of individual performances; in other words, there is no one catch-all definition of testimonial theater. However, performances identified as testimonial theater often share similar traits. Sometimes called "documentary theater" or "verbatim theater," testimonial theater often incorporates the personal narratives of politically marginalized individuals, uses direct address, and foregrounds acts of witnessing (which Athol Fugard called "telling the truth"). Sometimes these narratives are interpreted by a playwright and sometimes they are performed by actors and sometimes they are spoken by the speakers themselves. This definition is culled from Amanda Stuart Fisher's *Performing the Testimonial: Rethinking Verbatim Dramaturgies* (Manchester University Press, 2020).
[253] Caroline Wake, "To Witness Mimesis: The Politics, Ethics, and Aesthetics of Testimonial Theatre in *Through the Wire*" (*Modern Drama*, 56:1, Spring 2013), 104.

Salverson asserts that the rehearsal room serves as a "liminal space, set apart from everyday life, that facilitates emotional intimacy among participants."[254] This intimacy encourages participants to share their trauma, perhaps before they are ready to do so. Salverson warns that "the rehearsal space can invite testimony without necessarily being able to receive or contain it."[255] Wake describes the dangers of this particular form of "risk of repetition" differently, saying that emotional intimacy may encourage participants to tell their traumatic stories – some of whom have never told them before. Unlocking these traumatic events, Wake warns, may be dangerous for the storyteller when the room is not set up to receive their trauma.

The conditions Wake describes very much mirror the conditions of working with incarcerated participants. Jones' participants frequently recount the worst times in their lives. Often the stories they tell delineate the circumstances that precipitated their incarceration, stories they have been forced to recount before in hostile spaces.[256] During "Arts Facilitator Best Practices: Tools for Teaching Inside Prison," a 2021 workshop facilitated by Jones and several members of The Medea Project, Jones elucidated the importance of a "trauma-informed" rehearsal space, noting that trauma-informed care and gender-specific care are instrumental principles to follow when working inside prisons. In order to create a space that can "contain" these stories without retraumatizing the participants, Jones works methodically to lead participants in purposeful exercises geared toward making them gradually more comfortable with their feelings of vulnerability. Jones' rehearsal room focuses on building her participants' tolerance to vulnerability through their relationship with the group and through trauma-informed

[254] Ibid.
[255] Salverson quoted in Wake, 104.
[256] It should be noted that the process Wake describes involves a playwright; Jones' participants write the stories themselves.

modes of storytelling, such as telling stories using abstract physical movements. At the same time, Jones works to set intentional but flexible boundaries.

As the opening chant of *When Did Your Hands Become a Weapon?* indicates, the performance work Jones engages in oscillates between celebrating the power of women and detailing the extreme hardships some women undergo, such as drug addiction and domestic abuse. Jones often says that her work is simply about creating a space for women to talk to each other. However, a deeper investigation shows that her artistic toolkit is expansive and heavily influenced by multiple disciplines including theater, education, social work, activism, and feminist theory. As I will argue, Jones' trauma-informed processes allow her to responsibly elicit participant vulnerability, and to eventually repackage that vulnerability into power.

It should be noted that although this chapter focuses on Jones' work with The Medea Project, her ability to safely navigate vulnerable spaces may be aptly applied to more traditional rehearsal room contexts as one considers how to create a room that safely engages with difficult material.

Rhodessa Jones: A Cultural Odyssey

I've always been interested in autobiographical theater, because I want it to be seen and heard. I bring all of this as a director to the process.[257]
–Rhodessa Jones

In working with Medea Project participants, Jones is drawing from an expansive artistic toolkit. As a performer, dancer, singer, writer, social activist, and educator, Jones is constantly adapting her praxis to the needs of the women she works with. Jones says about her process, "It's organic, so it's constantly coming… I have a basis for some structured ways in, but at the same time, I really count on my spirit"[258] to guide the development of each production. Jones says that

[257] Jones interview, November 8, 2018.
[258] Jones interview, March 12, 2019.

her "structured way in" comes from studying various forms of performance. Her performance background includes participating in Bill Irwin's Saturday morning clowning workshop, as well as studying contact improvisation with Steve Paxton. Additionally, as a younger artist, she recounts doing "sound and movement" exercises with her brother, the famed choreographer Bill T. Jones, where they explored "speaking and moving" together.[259]

Born in 1948, Jones has often used art to reconcile her own difficult experiences. A 2010 profile outlined Jones' transient childhood as one of twelve children of migrant farmworkers who spent most of the year on the road "all over the Eastern seaboard."[260] As she and her siblings traveled from camps to crowded dormitories, they made up games to play. These games served as entertainment; they also gave the migrant children a voice. Jones would later say that The Medea Project started simply by playing children's games.[261] As Marta Effinger-Crichlow writes:

> Jones argued that staying in labor camps, like Bellenger's Camp in upstate New York, "was empowering in a very physical way" for it forced her to connect with primal emotions like death and dying as well as lust and love. Saturday nights at the camp included the power of the blues and gambling, the lure of her mother's barbecue and dance contests, women fighting over legendary men in the crews, the selling of homemade alcohol, and the invasion of the authorities.[262]

As Jones' own storytelling process developed, she would often revisit these stories in her autobiographical material.

When Jones was 10 her parents sought stability and moved permanently to a small town in upstate New York. At 16, Jones had a daughter, Saundra Lee, and soon after moved to

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[259] Ibid.
[260] Robert Hurwitt, "Rhodessa Jones' Life a Cultural Odyssey," *Sfgate.com,* February 21, 2010.
[261] The Medea Project, "Arts Facilitator Best Practices: Tools for Teaching Inside Prison" (workshop, September 2-November 11, 2021).
[262] Marta Effinger-Crichlow, *Staging Migrations Toward an American West: from Ida B. Wells to Rhodessa Jones* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2014), 190.

Rochester, NY to attend college. Jones and her brothers, Bill T. and Azel, became involved in "Rochester's interracial hippie arts scene."[263] Jones joined the Living Arts Theater where she saw women leading an artistic institution for the first time: "While the women directed plays and designed sets, the men carried the babies and made meals."[264] In the Living Arts Theater, Jones realized the social power of theater, which she describes as "gaining a sense of self-worth."[265]

Jones moved to San Francisco in 1973 and helped form the Jones Company with her brothers. She danced with the radical feminist Tumbleweed collective and then, in the mid 70s, needing to pay for her daughter's schooling, got a job as a "peekaboo dancer" in the Tenderloin. Four years later, Jones created *The Legend of Lily Overstreet* based on her time working as a nude dancer. There, Jones helped organize the other dancers to advocate for better working conditions. By the late-70s she was being funded by the Comprehensive Employment Training Act and subsequently by the California Arts Council to teach drama and art in various elementary and high schools.

One of Jones' most influential partnerships is with musician Ackamoor, whom she met in 1979.[266] In *American Theatre Magazine*, Ackamoor recounts first meeting Jones: "I saw this diamond in the rough, this amazing female artist…She was so magnetic, so adventuresome."[267] Jones performed her autobiographical work "in story, dance and song, and sometimes naked,"[268] touring the production all over San Francisco and in Europe with Ackamoor on saxophone.[269] In 1983, Jones joined Ackamoor's jazz and dance troupe, Cultural Odyssey, and honed her craft

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[263] Hurwitt, "Rhodessa Jones' Life."
[264] Effinger-Crichlow, *Staging Migrations,* 205.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, "The Medea Project for Incarcerated Women: Liberating Medea" (Syllecta Classica, Department of Classics, University of Iowa, Vol. 19, 2008), 244.
[267] Schiffman, "Activist Performer."
[268] Hurwitt, "Rhodessa Jones' Life.".
[269] Schiffman, "Activist Performer."

through the development of several autobiographical plays she toured in Europe, including *Hot Flashes, Power Surges and Private Summers,* her exploration of menopause.

In the late 1980s, Jones was invited by the director of the Artists-in-Residence program at the San Francisco County Jails to teach an aerobics class.

> When I went in I was amazed at all the women that were there. They were so angry. They were just so sad and ashamed, and just ready to do battle with each other. I thought, "What can I really do?" Because they weren't interested in aerobics. A lot of these women would sit there with their arms folded and their mouths pushed out, and they were just like, "What the fuck is this?"[270]

Many of the women Jones works with are in an overall state of uncertainty, waiting to be sent to prison or waiting to be released. With so little control over their daily lives, incarcerated women are subject to a rigid schedule, the unpredictability of the personalities of other incarcerated individuals and corrections officers, and oftentimes the loss of their familial support system. Drawing on her work as an educator, Jones' first step in creating a sense of stability was simply to talk to the women. "I started talking about my own life, because I'm very good at that. I just started talking about who I was. I wanted to make a connection with them."[271]

In a pivotal story-sharing moment in the early days of The Medea Project, a woman named "Lisa" surprised the members with an intimate and harrowing story about her escape from a group of men she believed were going to kill her. As Jones recounts it:

> I remember there was a young white woman. I think her name was Lisa, or Lisette maybe. She told the story of her girlfriend setting her up with these guys. They'd all gone to high school together. She was a lesbian, and the leader of the guys was this guy who'd always liked her. He was very embittered that she was very out as a lesbian. Her girlfriend had gotten her to come over to this literally abandoned house that was being done over to make a deal with this guy…because they were all little drug dealers.[272]

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[270] Jones interview, November 8, 2018.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid.

Jones says that Lisa described being in a living room with several men; on the table was a bag of coke and some money. After figuring out that Lisa's girlfriend was not going to show up, the men started playing strip poker and told her to "take off her pants." Lisa laughed and said okay, but "I never take my boots off. Ha ha ha." Feeling that she had to get out of there, Lisa kicked over the table, grabbed the drugs and the money, and jumped out of a window. After being shot by one of the men, she flagged down a car, shouting, "These guys are going to kill me."[273]

Jones identifies Lisa's offering as the structural seed for The Medea Project process:

> When she was telling us this story she could hardly breathe. She just kept saying, "I got, I got, and the, and then." I said to all the women, because all the women were enthralled, I said, "Now we have to lift her up, y'all. Let's place our hands on her. Lift her up, lift her up. Help her to breathe." They all just rushed in, and everybody was crying. In that moment I thought, "There's something here. There's something here about how do we help women to understand that we are a cultural group? How do we support each other?" That was the beginning for me in my own mind…and I thought, "I want to create a space for incarcerated women to tell their stories."[274]

In discussing how she develops her praxis, Jones frequently reflects on these early days where the group would simply talk and respond to stories by "lifting each other up." "The first time I meet with women, it's a circle. I talk about the work, the intimacy, the honesty that comes with making, just finding our voices. I don't even talk about theater. I talk about finding our voices."[275]

In 1989 Jones created her solo performance piece, *Big-Butt Girls, Hard-Headed Women*, based on the lives of the incarcerated women she met during this first residency in the San Francisco County Jail.[276] After Jones finished her international tour of *Big-Butt Girls, Hard-Headed Women*, she asked if she could teach another class at the jail, this time with women only.

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[273] Jones interview, November 8, 2018.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Jones interview, March 12, 2019.
[276] The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women, themedeaproject.weebly.com.

Sean Reynolds, a social worker she had met previously at the jail, became a key supporter of Jones' work and helped funnel women into her class.[277] As Rena Fraden writes in *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theater for Incarcerated Women*, "Jones and Reynolds together are a formidable pair. Reynolds' background as a social worker, writer, and activist dovetails perfectly with Jones's artistic life work."[278] As Jones states, "Sean was my mentor. She kind of whispered in my ear about what they needed. That they have to be put center stage in their lives. They have to be made to see that that's important, that's the only place that you can be…"[279] This instrumental partnership – marrying social work with theater - helped Jones establish her trauma-informed storytelling process.

Jones says that she has developed a rigorous performance praxis. As she states, "I've been doing this work for almost forty years, so I do have systems… all these questions and games and structures."[280] At the same time, Jones' structure is fueled by flexibility. "I have all these processes; it's my backup. But I love to walk in and let them [the participants] inform me in a lot of ways."[281] Although Jones calls this part of her process "intuition," she also recognizes that being able to respond intuitively to the needs of the room is part of her methodology. In other words, flexibility is an intentional part of her rigorous practices and a core component in developing (safe) vulnerable spaces. Being flexible, she says, allows the methods to constantly evolve to respond to different stories.

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[277] Rena Fraden, *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones & Theater for Incarcerated Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 42.
[278] Fraden, *Imagining Medea,* 78.
[279] Jones interview, March 12, 2019.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid.

Vulnerability: Creating the Container

> *I think political theater is rooted in truth telling, but it's also physically how do we ground each other and how do we become a part of each other? And it's something as simple as everybody place your hands on this person…it's like a laying on of hands when somebody is suffering.*[282]
> – Rhodessa Jones

Jones' praxis is very much rooted in a womanist/feminist, queer, trans, antiracist, anti-authoritarian, and anti-austerity framework. Jones welcomes participants into The Medea Project who have historically been labeled "vulnerable" – incarcerated women, formerly incarcerated women, and women living with HIV. Through the collective, participant vulnerability is transformed into a type of empowerment, by way of supportive interpersonal relationships and public visibility (advocacy) secured through Medea Project performances. In this way, participants claim power *through* their vulnerability, not *in spite of it.*

In the introduction to *Vulnerability in Resistance,* the anthology's editors, Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, argue that two fundamental concepts – vulnerability and resistance – are often put in opposition to one another. The editors state that such subject vulnerability can be mobilized to disrupt masculinist social and political institutions.[283] Additionally, when vulnerable bodies are mobilized, they have the potential to resist being appropriated by paternalism. In other words, being vulnerable (often equated with victimization) is not necessarily a passive state in need of active protection.[284] Quite the opposite. Adhering to critical feminist social theory that seeks to disavow "masculine as active" and "feminine as passive,"[285] vulnerability – as characterized by interdependency and public action – holds the promise of "developing new modes of collective agency that do not deny vulnerability as a

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[282] Jones interview, March 12, 2019.
[283] Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, eds., *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 2.
[284] Ibid., 3.
[285] Ibid., 3.

resource and that aspire to equality, freedom, and justice in their political aims."[286] According to the editors, vulnerability has the potential to link people together. Vulnerable subjects that share a common source of vulnerability – such as migrants, victims of domestic violence, and incarcerated individuals – build supportive connections by sharing these experiences with one another.

In the case of Jones, The Medea Project facilitates participant empowerment through several of the editor's benchmarks. First, it brings vulnerable women together who have intersecting struggles. Through conversations, participants find commonalities that serve as a form of community-building and, eventually, support system. In writing and developing stories for Medea Project productions, participants claim ownership over the difficulties they have experienced. In the introduction to *Practice and Research in Social Work: Postmodern Feminist Perspectives*, Barbara Fawcett and Brid Featherstone describe the ways in which vulnerable subjects can find strength through talking to one another. Fawcett and Featherstone assert that by "opening up spaces for women to tell their stories that have been suppressed by men in their theorizing about the world (stories about maternal practices, for example), they have challenged what it means to be a subject."[287] The editor's claim that these publicly presented narratives have the potential to destigmatize the experiences that precipitate participants' vulnerability in the first place (such as addiction, abuse, and incarceration).

Fawcett and Featherstone argue that feminist thinking stresses the importance of subjectivity through interdependence (i.e., positions within a group, their family, their community) instead of through the eyes of the state. When vulnerability is openly discussed –

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[286] Ibid., 4.

[287] Barbara Fawcett, Brid Featherstone, Jan Fook, and Amy Rossiter, eds., *Practice and Research in Social Work: Postmodern Feminist Perspectives* (Routledge, 2000), 14.

allowing for relationships to be formed, mobilizing vulnerable bodies, and making visible vulnerable subjects – vulnerability moves from an oppressed subject position to a form of empowerment. Community-based theater methodologies often revolve around these same 'vulnerability as a conduit to agency-making' ideologies. Sarah Chalmers, Co-Founding Artistic Director of the community-based theater Civic Ensemble[288], says that as a community-based facilitator her main responsibility is to "create structures to make work"[289] that go beyond the immediate task of mounting a performance but that can model a "supportive group that will carry forward to different parts of their year."[290] Her emphasis, then, is not on training participants to become "good" actors but to build a system of thought that emphasizes supportive relationships and community-building through interdependence. This approach encourages participants to think critically about themselves and their relationships with others.

By participating in this relational structure that deems vulnerability necessary to claiming one's agency, participants can resist coercive ideologies that seek to codify them as "weak." Facilit*auteurs* can "create structures to make work"[291] that engender a rethinking of vulnerability as a static position that needs "fixing." Instead, the focus can be on vulnerability as an offering that builds relationships which in turn support and empower the participant.

In endeavoring to create an infrastructure based on supportive relationships, Jones recounts how she relied heavily on telling personal stories to the women in the group during the first few sessions of what would become The Medea Project. Jones would often share her

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[288] Civic Ensemble is a community-based theater located in Ithaca, NY. Its mission statement reads: "Civic Ensemble creates theatre that explores and explodes the social, political, and cultural issues of our time. We bring audiences of different races, classes, and experiences together in a public forum on the American experiment." https://www.civicensemble.org/about
[289] Sarah Chalmers, interview by author, January 8, 2019.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid.

personal stories of struggle to bring the women "into the circle," eventually finding comfortable moments of connection where she could open the circle to the rest of the group. In doing so, Jones offers her participants an invitation rather than an ultimatum. Participants are not coerced through fear of not following orders into telling stories, but instead are invited into the circle through Jones' personal offering of vulnerability.

Jones does not ask participants to share more than she is willing to share herself. As she puts it, "How am I going to ask them to be open and forthcoming if I'm not?"[292] As Jones offers herself – vulnerable and raw – she allows participants to view vulnerability as an element of agency. In other words, as the group's leader, Jones gives the women a model of someone who demonstrates that vulnerability is not incongruous with autonomy. In bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom,* hooks asserts that "empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive."[293] In many ways, hooks taps into the editor's insistence that vulnerability, when it is relational and mobilized, can negate paternalism. Institutional power can only be displaced when the people with the power in the room also participate in its displacement.

One of the most pressing aspects of Jones' work is facilitating the exhumation of participants' deeply-held trauma. In *Psychological Trauma,* psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk says that "social support" is intimately connected to one's ability (or inability) to overcome psychological trauma.[294] Van der Kolk's studies indicate that people who have a strong support

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[292] Jones interview, November 8, 2018.
[293] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 21.
[294] Bessel Van der Kolk, *Psychological Trauma* (American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc., 1987); 11.

system can maintain a sense of trust and safety after a traumatic event. However, a lack or loss of social support during traumatic events can lead to lifelong issues surrounding trust and safety. In Van der Kolk's studies with children, he found that when children are abused by those they have grown to depend on for "safety and nurturance," a lifelong distrust of others and chronic rage issues become more prevalent. As he states, "A lack of social support following trauma heightens the sense of lost security."[295] In her article, "Vulnerable Times," Marianne Hirsch urges her readers to consider vulnerability as a space of "radical openness"[296] in which "surprising possibilities"[297] emerge. Hirsch argues that vulnerability allows for a certain amount of elasticity that enables the subject to adapt and recover from shocks, surprises, and negative factors.[298]

Jones' goal, then, is to establish a social support system in which participants can trust one another enough to be vulnerable. As I have experienced first-hand in Jones' "Arts Facilitator Best Practices" workshop, vulnerability is a catalyst for facilitating trust between participants. Through Jones' exercises (which I discuss more below), members in the group learn to trust each other by offering vulnerable stories that are met (by way of the container Jones creates) with empathy and understanding. As Hirsch states, "The openness created by the admission of vulnerability, it is said, produces strength and fosters connection."[299] Furthermore, Hirsch asserts that in practice, vulnerability may be used as a form of "*attunement* and *responsibility*" that helps others' "ability to respond."[300] Through lifting up their fellow participants, The Medea Project

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[295] Ibid.
[296] Marianne Hirsch, "Vulnerable Times," in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 81.
[297] Ibid., 82.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Ibid., 84.

participants are simultaneously validating their own experiences, finding room to forgive themselves, and creating a supportive community that allows them to move forward.

In *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma,* Bessel Van der Kolk notes that forming relationships is a key aspect in healing from trauma. Van der Kolk maintains that almost all individuals who have experienced trauma, and subsequent PTSD, have difficulty maintaining "workable and satisfying relationships" and "regulating arousal,"[301] which then causes the sufferer to become enraged, shut down, overly excited, or disorganized (or a combination of these symptoms). Van der Kolk's research suggests that forming connections with others can help alleviate some of these symptoms. At the same time, Van der Kolk warns that:

> Social support is not the same as merely being in the presence of others. The critical issue is reciprocity: being truly heard and seen by the people around us, feeling that we are held in someone else's mind and heart. For our physiology to calm down, heal, and grow we need a visceral feeling of safety. No doctor can write a prescription for friendship and love: These are complex and hard-earned capacities."[302]

It is through the reciprocal nature of The Medea Project – vulnerability and trust – that healing begins. These curative elements of Jones' process hinge on the women in the group being able to rely on the friendship and accountability of the community they form.

The relational infrastructure of The Medea Project allows the women to confront difficult pasts. Jones nudges the women into often uncomfortable and vulnerable terrain, insisting that they claim all the pieces of their identity through the collective support of the group:

> Claim it all, too, I say. Claim everything. *Everything.* Let us begin with our mother's names, every scar that we have, claim it. Every act. Every misappropriate action. Every mistake you made. *Claim it.* If we can claim it, if we can put a pile of it here, we can go

[301] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score : Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 93.
[302] Ibid.

> through it and find the jewels, the baubles. We got to get rid of the shit, but first of all you got to claim it. It also helps to get moving on.[303]

Through the container that Jones builds, she provides the space for women to "claim it." However, as she notes, she was not always comfortable bringing up traumatic issues such as violence. In the beginning of the program, she relied on her mentor, social worker Sean Reynolds, to ask the tougher questions:

> Sean was great at bringing up stuff like violence. Sean said, "Is it okay that somebody can just beat you? And you keep coming back to him or her? And why, why say okay?" And you have people who have never thought about it. It's what they deserve, and why is it that you deserve it, why? Sean would turn to them and say, "Well, how do y'all feel about this?" And women would say, "Well I don't have nobody" and another woman would say, "Me neither." And you see women looking like, yeah that's a possibility, it's an idea that I don't have to be battered and beaten.[304]

As a health educator already working in the prison system, Reynolds provided Jones a framework for facilitating difficult conversations that Jones draws on to this day. Informed by social service methodologies, Reynolds' process provided a container for the participants to find community and redefine themselves through this community. When Reynolds poses the question, "Is it okay that somebody can just beat you?" the participants respond that they "don't have nobody." The first admission of vulnerability ("I don't have nobody") elicits a cascade of understanding through the response "me neither." Vulnerable discussions surrounding violence help destigmatize and destabilize participants' positions as "victims." Through their frank discussions, participants are able to find commonalities and more critically analyze the path that brought them into these turbulent situations. Women who assert that they "don't have nobody" are now positioned in a room full of people who can potentially understand their feelings of isolation. Angela Wilson, who has been a member of The Medea Project since 1998 and now

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[303] Jones quoted in Fraden, 108.
[304] Jones interview, March 12, 2019.

serves as one of its facilitators, says "…in that circle, when you hear, 'Oh, that happened to me. It didn't necessarily happen that way, but it happened to me.' I'm not alone…it's incredibly empowering."[305]

Much of Jones' methodologies are geared towards creating a space where relationships are formed, ultimately leading to individuals being able to make self-discoveries through the support of the group. Lisa Biggs describes this facet of Jones' process as eliciting a confession, which French philosopher Michel Foucault theorizes has "intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it…unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him and promises him salvation."[306] In "Restorytive Justice," Sara Warner states that Jones creates a circumstance in her rehearsal room for her participants to remake their stories, excavating what the participants have codified as "truth" (confession, testimony, witnessing, etc.) in order to look at it from a different angle.

One of Jones' tools for excavating the truth is her "Hidden Talents Questionnaire."[307] In "Nudging the Memory: Creating Performance with The Medea Project Theater for Incarcerated Women," Jones describes the questionnaire as a way to revisit "places and people who influenced you and why…,"[308] noting that the questionnaire is central to The Medea Project's creative process.[309] In Jones' "Arts Facilitator Best Practices" workshop, she notes that two of the first questions she asks participants are, "how did you arrive here?" and "who did you leave

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[305] Angela Wilson, "Once Upon a Time in A Place Called Now: An Interactive Storytelling Workshop for Artists, Activists, and Educators," Film Forum, Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts, October 20, 2022.
[306] Lisa Biggs, "Serious Fun at Sun City: Theatre for Incarcerated Women in the 'New' South Africa (*Theatre Survey*, Vol. 1, January 2016, pp 4-36), 19.
[307] Rhodessa Jones, "Nudging the Memory: Creating Performance with The Medea Project: Theatre for Incarcerated Women," in *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches,* eds. Sharrell D. Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 61.
[308] Jones, "Nudging the Memory," 61.
[309] Ibid.

at home?" Jones says that "The interview is a portal...questions that help us explore something we may not have in a long time."[310]

In my own experience in several of Jones' workshops, she often pairs participants together to answer one or several "hidden talents" questions, such as, "what do you want the world to know about you?" and "describe a time you escaped death." After partners share their stories with one another, Jones asks each partner to share the other person's story with the group. Through this guided story-sharing process, participants are compelled to actively listen to each other, often finding commonalities in their respective answers. Hirsch says that "aesthetic encounters" (reading, looking, and listening) allow us to be "vulnerable as we practice openness, interconnection, and imagination…"[311] Through the questionnaire exercise, participants practice being vulnerable in an intimate setting while also receiving the benefit of distance – they are not telling the story themselves – when their partner recounts their story to the larger group. This exercise serves multiple functions as it encourages connection through one-on-one storytelling, asks participants to be responsible for taking care of each other through the retelling, and allows participants to speak publicly without the added pressure of recounting their own vulnerable experiences.

A requirement of the "Hidden Talents Questionnaire" is that everybody participate. During a 2019 workshop at Cornell University, Jones did not allow anyone (including professors) to observe – they *had* to participate. Within Jones' process, vulnerability is something everyone must share in. Student Carley Robinson recalls that the participation of

[310] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," workshop, October 28, 2021.
[311] Hirsch, "Vulnerable Times,"82.

students and teachers fostered a sense of connection and made the space feel less hierarchical. As Robinson noted, "everyone was on the same team."[312]

Similar to the questionnaire, Jones uses myths and folktales as a gentle way into discussions surrounding trauma. Jones describes the folktale as an allegory for working from "trauma to redemption."[313] By focusing on folktales, participants are able to identify different themes in a fictional story that they can potentially relate back to their own lives. Within the performance-making process, Jones says that once the group has picked out certain themes of a folktale, they are asked to recount the story in their own words. Jones asks participants to notice which parts of the story they are drawn to most and why, sharing their answers with the group. In this way, participants are able to make their own discoveries within the text, claiming ownership over which parts of their story they want to share with the larger group. Jones then asks participants to write down their own version of the story, using pieces of their lived experience and performing it for the group, in words or gestures or both. In this way, the myth serves as a sort of safety net – a container for trauma that can be surreptitiously mined by participants.

As Sara Warner explains, The Medea Project was named for the group's first performance, "an adaptation of the ancient Greek tragedy *Medea* by Euripides."[314] Jones brought in the story of Medea to spark a conversation. However, while Jones thought that the story *should* mean something to the group, when she handed out the classic tale no one in the group seemed interested.[315] One day a woman who was usually in the group was absent; she had been locked down for disruptive behavior after finding out that the father of her children was in jail

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[312] Carley Robinson, interview by author, July 1, 2021.
[313] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," workshop, October 28, 2021.
[314] Sara Warner, "Restorytive Justice: Theater as a Redressive Mechanism for Incarcerated Women," in *Razor Wire Women: Prisoners, Activists, Scholars, and Artists*, eds. Jodie Michelle Lawston and Ashley E. Lucas (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 237.
[315] Fraden, 43.

and that her children would soon be sent to foster care. Fraden writes that "Jones remembers Reynolds came in to report this and asked: 'What's up y'all? What the fuck's going on? What is it that makes us leave our children?'"[316] The group began talking about parenting and then Jones told them the story of Medea. As the conversation continued, the incarcerated women expressed their anger at Medea, saying, "That bitch was fucked up for killing her kids."[317] Jones then asked, "What are the ways we kill our children?"[318] and challenged the women to grapple with the ways they may have been complicit in the trauma of their own children's lives. From there, the women began writing their own stories and became, as Jones asserts, an "us." "All of a sudden there was a troupe mentality. All of a sudden there was an 'Us.' I thought, Wow!...this is ours."[319]

Additionally, part of becoming an "us," in Jones' view, is through the healing power of touch and movement. Jones maintains that within The Medea Project physicalization serves to process traumatic information that is "too hard to hold."[320] Van der Kolk states that people who have experienced trauma tend to dissociate from their bodies. Bodies suffering from PTSD can become physically numb – not able to recognize physical sensations. Others may be stuck in a "fight or flight" mode even when there is no threat in sight. Van der Kolk argues that in order for trauma sufferers to feel a sense of agency – the "feeling of being in charge of your life: knowing where you stand, knowing that you have a say in what happens to you, knowing that you have some ability to shape your circumstances"[321] – they must cultivate a greater awareness of their body-based feelings. As Van der Kolk says, "Knowing what we feel is the first step to knowing

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[316] Fraden, 44.
[317] Jones quoted in Fraden, 44.
[318] Jones quoted in Fraden, 44.
[319] Jones quoted in Fraden, 45.
[320] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," workshop, September 16, 2021.
[321] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 111.

why we feel that way,"[322] which ultimately leads to having a greater sense of control over one's life. Jones takes every opportunity she can to ground participants through physical touch. As she states, sometimes this can be as simple as asking the women in the group to "lay their hands" on someone as they tell a story.

As Jones explains it, the physical exercises she employs help process trauma but also physically connect the group. Jones often encourages participants to physicalize stories abstractly, using tenets of modern dance to foreground their movements. Jones herself danced for many years and has found that movement (versus staging) resists a direct mimesis of the participant's traumatic event, encouraging participants to embody feelings that may be too difficult to express verbally. This technique encourages participants to resist the urge to dissociate, asking them to stay firmly present in their bodies.

During the Feminist Directions symposium at Cornell University (2019) that I organized, Jones described the early days of The Medea Project, and how she realized the ways embodiment could make tangible the members' contribution to and influence on the group. Jones recounted enacting one of her characters from *Big Butt Girls, Hard Headed Women* for the participants. The women began to tell Jones how to more realistically embody a woman in jail. As they spoke, Jones asked them to mold her body to create the physicality of an incarcerated woman. She recalls:

> And at first, they were like, we can just touch you and stuff? I said, yeah, I said is the titties out, is the bust hanging out? And they're like "no, that's too much." And they would argue, but I became the instrument which was really interesting. "No, she didn't have her hands like this, put your hands like this, Miss. Jones." And it was like this whole thing of they'd stand there and they'd look at it. And one woman said, "that's a serious work of art, there." She was an inmate and it surprised the hell out of her. But the atmosphere in the room became far more artistic and sisterly and warm and creative.[323]

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[322] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 111.

[323] Rhodessa Jones, "Feminist Directions," roundtable, Department of Performing and Media Arts, Cornell University, May 16, 2019.

In inviting the participants to help shape her physicality and by extension her performance, Jones invited the participants into the artistic process, asking them to collaboratively contribute to Jones' performance. As they were literally shaping Jones, the women had a hand in effecting how their borrowed image would be represented on the outside. Additionally, the intimate invitation to touch her body implied trust, which she offered to the women as a form of responsibility.

In *Prison & Theatre,* Caoimhe McAvinchey describes a similar exercise led by Lois Weaver. Between 2002 and 2004, Weaver and her artistic partner, Peggy Shaw, worked in women's prisons in England and Brazil as part of the Staging Human Rights program.[324] In her exercise, Weaver recites a story and then chooses a character from the story that she invites the group to mold with her body. As McAvinchey reports, at first the participants are timid, afraid to manipulate this figure of authority. However, as it becomes clear that their actions won't warrant punishment, they become more comfortable sculpting Weaver: "By offering herself as a model for the group, by literally putting herself in the group's hands, Lois articulates both her trust in the group and the expectation she has of the group to take responsibility for her and each other."[325] McAvinchey asserts that the women then apply the same physical care and respect to sculpting each other. And, later, take the same care in performing each other's stories.

One of Jones' foundational movements is "Hand Dancing," based on American Sign Language. Jones says that hand dancing "accelerates the birth of the ensemble"[326] and "encourages positive group action."[327] An oft-used hand dance Jones employs is based on a

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[324] Caoimhe McAvinchey, *Theatre & Prison* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 64.
[325] Ibid., 66.
[326] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," workshop, September 16, 2021.
[327] Jones, "Nudging the Memory," 64.

poem by Stevie Smith called "Not Waving But Drowning." The words that accompany the dance, adapted from the poem, go as follows:

> Understand me. Back then I wasn't waving, I was drowning and you saw me. You were the only one who saw me.[328]

Each word is accompanied by an ASL gesture that the group performs in unison. Jones says that she chose the poem because it can be widely interpreted. Medea Project facilitator, Angela Wilson, says she views the poem as being about someone coming out of jail and being tempted to get high – which closely reflects her own experiences.[329] Jones encourages participants to find their own meaning in these ritualized gestures but also considers them a form of responsibility: each member commits to the gesture and to move as a group.[330]

Jones notes that adding group movements to Medea Project productions has a practical function as well. "The jail administration wanted us all [to remain] onstage at the same time so it became a way to make transitions without going offstage."[331]

Jones also insists on a physical ritual to open and close each Medea Project session. This ritual is akin to a "warm up" in traditional rehearsal spaces and can involve different exercises and offerings. Sometimes the group opens and closes the session in meditation. Often Jones will pose a question from the Hidden Talents Questionnaire. Longtime group members recite a mantra accompanied by a choreographed dance. These opening and closing rituals are similar to how intimacy directors use "tap-ins," a group action that indicates the beginning and end of a scene. For example, in an intimacy workshop I attended led by Claire Warden, Warden and her partner gave each other a high-five before they acted in a scene together. After the scene ended,

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[328] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," workshop, September 2, 2021.
[329] Ibid.
[330] Jones, "Nudging the Memory," 64.
[331] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," workshop, September 16, 2021.

they high-fived again in order to separate actor from character. Jones' opening and closing ritual works similarly, providing a door that opens and closes the sacred space they have built together. In Van der Kolk's view, these ritualized warm-ups also provide an easily accessible doorway to social engagement for participants who might find other forms of story-sharing overwhelming.[332]

Despite the attention Jones gives to building her container, vulnerability can be messy. As she says, "It's not going to be nice. It's not going to be tidy. But life isn't nice and tidy…If you got to cry, it's okay. Go ahead and cry."[333] As mentioned above, everyone who enters the space *must engage in the process.* It can be difficult, and as Jones recounts, sometimes precipitates women leaving the group. "I've lost people because they can't go that deep. They want the food, they want the camaraderie of women, but the heart of the work is hard and dark…"[334] In discussing The Medea Project's 1999 production of *Slouching Toward Armageddon: A Captive's Conversation/Observation on Race*, Effinger-Crichlow writes "that some inmates could not handle the physicality of the project, nor could they deal with authority, such as Jones' continuous and rigorous instruction."[335] In "Restorytive Justice," Warner explains that not all women tell the truth in The Medea Project, especially at the beginning. "For many women, the truth is simply unbearable. For others it is buried too deep to excavate."[336] Jones says that after years of abuse, some women are simply not able to trust anymore.

Boundaries, Professionalism, and Feminist Ethics of Care

I really believe in a collaborative leadership, especially when it's based in such truth telling, and practicing revolution.[337]– Rhodessa Jones

[332] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score,* 101.
[333] Jones interview, November 8, 2018.
[334] Ibid.
[335] Effinger-Crichlow, *Staging Migrations,* 208.
[336] Warner, "Restorytive Justice," 238.
[337] Jones interview, November 8, 2018.

In an interview, Jones repeatedly said that she "takes responsibility" for her participants.[338] As she said, "My job is like a nurse or chief battle watcher…I lead them through the muck and the mire. I take that position very seriously, that I'm responsible for women being able to open their hearts."[339] The first session of her 11-week "Arts Facilitator Best Practices" workshop focused on facilitator self-care. Jones asserts that taking responsibility for others first means taking care of oneself. In her words, a lack of self-care results in a lack of boundaries. Jones strongly asserts that boundaries create safety for facilitators and the participants – especially within carceral spaces.

Lisa Frias, a member and facilitator of The Medea Project since 1995, says that self-care is where a facilitator's practice begins. If facilitators are not taking care of themselves, she says, the leadership they are offering is of "less caliber."[340] In my experience as a facilit*auteur*, whether in a traditional theater, educational theater, community theater, or carceral spaces, the needs of actor-participants can be overwhelming. In "From Self-Care to Collective Care," Lisa Chamberlain asserts that the culture of activism can expect, and even celebrate, the workers' putting themselves at risk.[341] Chamberlain identifies dangerous norms within activist organizations, movements, and communities such as rarely taking time off, working long hours, and ignoring one's health. I draw many parallels from Chamberlain's research to the expectations placed on artists, especially artists working in vulnerable communities, who are both at once performing traditional theater labor (producing a show) and creating the circumstances for participants to find community – which often involves a great deal of

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[338] Ibid.
[339] Ibid.
[340] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," workshop, September 2, 2021.
[341] Lisa Chamberlain, "From Self-Care to Collective Care," *International Journal on Human Rights* (January 2020), 216.

emotional labor. In addition, Chamberlain notes that many folx who tend to work in activist spaces "occupy a dual position in that they work with victims of human rights violations and can be victims of such violations themselves. This gives rise to high levels of both primary and secondary trauma."[342] In a similar creative parallel, this puts the facilit*auteur* in a difficult position if they have not yet worked through their own trauma.

In Frias' experience as a writer, performer, and choreographer in The Medea Project, a lack of self-care leads to an inability to mitigate difficult situations, decreased empathy, and a lack of allyship. Fe Bongolan (a Medea Project participant of 33 years) says that self-care is what allows facilitators to be present, listening instead of judging. Jones insists that in order to listen to others' trauma, we must first take care of our own. As she says, "We [group leaders] don't share anything we haven't worked out ourselves…we will leak everywhere with our own trauma and not know how to make it safe for our clients."[343] She notes that The Medea Project is not a place for facilitators to work through their own issues.

Chamberlain maintains that the feminist movement has given us the tools to understand self-care as a political act of resistance, arguing that self-care should be exercised at the institutional level (what she calls *collective care*). As Chamberlain writes, "It is also important to understand that self-care has benefits for the organization as a whole. An [activist] maintaining a self-care practice is likely to be more productive, more innovative and more collaborative."[344] Jones, similarly, describes the importance of collective care, noting that it is vital for facilitators to model self-care for participants and build self-care into the organizational framework. Citing Black Lives Matter activist Patrisse Cullors, Jones contends that collective care seeks to change

[342] Chamberlain, "From Self-Care," 217.
[343] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," workshop, September 2, 2021.
[344] Chamberlain, "From Self-Care," 218.

self-care from an individual action (for example, "this person is having a bad day today and needs time off") to one that acknowledges the oppressive systems of power that affect the wellbeing of entire populations. To this end, Jones insists that facilitators practice self-awareness, noticing their triggers and biases, and creating lists of self-care needs. Further, facilitators must talk about these practices with the group in order to develop transparency and a sense of value within these collective care practices.

One of the ways that Jones creates and maintains strong boundaries within her trauma-informed practice is by asking facilitators to acknowledge their own privilege. Within The Medea Project, boundaries take different forms. One such form is the intentional reminder that there is indeed a separation between facilitator and participant. As Jones has frequently acknowledged in her workshops, Medea Project facilitators can go home; participants cannot.[345] There is an implicit power dynamic in the room between those who can leave and those who remain.

In "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," Jones asked participants to list the ways in which they (as facilitators) have privilege over incarcerated participants. Much of the workshop discussions of privilege revolved around issues of race. Wilson (a white Medea Project facilitator) explained to the group that she acknowledges that the simple fact of her whiteness can trigger participants who associate whiteness with a traumatic event in their life – such as a white social service worker taking their children away. Additionally, corrections officers are often white and sometimes wield that whiteness in violent ways. In acknowledging her privilege, Wilson stated that she will sometimes minimize herself – listening instead of leading – because often her job is simply to bear witness to others' stories. During a 2022 Medea Project workshop

[345] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," workshop, September 2, 2021.

titled "Once Upon a Time in A Place Called Now: An Interactive Storytelling Workshop for Artists, Activists, and Educators;" Wilson said "I'm the white girl, the fly on the wall, and so I've learned a lot of things that concern culture and race, and the struggles of watching my beloved mentor [Jones] struggle in the ways that racism affects people."[346]

In "The Boundaries of the Social Work Relationship Revisited: Towards a Connected, Inclusive and Dynamic Conceptualization," Patrick O'Leary, Ming-Sum Tsui, and Gillian Ruch assert that creating inclusive boundaries demands a recognition of the social worker's position of privilege, writing that "Social workers often come from the dominant cultural group; therefore, relationship forming with clients from minority groups requires an understanding and critical appraisal of dominant 'taken for granted' views of the world."[347] Within The Medea Project, this "understanding and critical appraisal"[348] demands that facilitators "be honest with themselves"[349] about how privilege is power.

Jones asked facilitators to make lists of their privileges, including things like a supportive family structure, a college degree, the ability to access information (with a home computer), the ability to buy material goods, the ability to call loved ones at any time, the ability to vote, and so on and so forth. By listing these privileges, Jones encouraged facilitators to become more self-aware. And, in becoming more self-aware, they are more able to practice self-care, and thus better able to respond to participant trauma. bell hooks describes this as a process of teachers and educators needing to self-actualize so that they can assist their students in their own process of

[346] Wilson, "Once Upon a Time."
[347] Patrick O'Leary, Ming-Sum Tsui, and Gillian Ruch, "The Boundaries of the Social Work Relationship Revisited: Towards a Connected, Inclusive and Dynamic Conceptualisation" (*The British Journal of Social Work* 43, 1, 2013), 148.
[348] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," workshop, September 9, 2021.
[349] Ibid.

self-discovery.[350] As Jones said, "You can't save anyone but you do have the power not to retraumatize people. You have the power to understand your own story."[351]

In acknowledging her own privilege, Jones recognizes that while some aspects of her experiences may resonate with participants, those experiences do not necessarily signify understanding. Jones has said she sees a lot of herself in the women she works with. At the same time, unlike many of The Medea Project participants, she had mentors and educators who helped her navigate difficult circumstances. As well, for Jones, theater has been essential: "theater saved my life." However, some participants, even very committed ones, do not have such an anchor to hold onto. Jones has seen many members, especially the women in her reentry programs navigating life on the outside after imprisonment, begin to self-sabotage.

As Jones illustrates in the following story, sometimes women come into the sessions drunk or high, or they disappear for weeks on end. In Jones' view, it is not fair to throw these women out of a group that may be the only community they have. At the same time, she is responsible for safeguarding the sanctity of the group and for producing the performance. Jones reminds herself of this as she navigates these difficult situations. Instead of hiding them or working them out with the individual herself, she makes the issue public, bringing the entire company into the circle. Here she describes a moment from a *When Did Your Hands Become a Weapon?* rehearsal:

> One of the women in the group this time - one of the ex-offenders in the company - she came in drunk twice. We're doing a show. It's like, one, you don't want the lights to change and this person is stumbling all around. I didn't have to send her home. I just read her the riot act, and she's been with me long enough to know, "No, can't do that." At the same time, she was saying, "Please don't throw me out of the group." I said, "Don't you perpetrate your own self-sabotage. Don't do it."[352]

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[350] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 17.
[351] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices," workshop, September 9, 2021.
[352] Jones interview, November 8, 2018.

O'Leary, Tsui, and Ruch insist that boundaries "need to include client participation"[353] and "require sensitive, context-specific responses and need to be understood as an on-going process requiring renegotiation, throughout the duration of professional involvement, as opposed to being founded on a static, immutable contract."[354] They argue that inclusive boundaries – aimed at serving vulnerable clients – must be made in conversation with the clients. Participants in Jones' group, for example, are part of this boundary-negotiation process. While Jones may establish the boundary that no one can be drunk or high during rehearsals, when those boundaries are crossed (such as in the story above), Jones brings the issue to the group. Jones describes this as a process of understanding that if you make the mistake publicly, you need to apologize publicly. It fosters a sense of accountability without shame. Jones does not advocate an "immutable contract" nor does she take a singular authoritarian stance. She demands that grievances – or boundary crossing – be made public so that the group can work it out amongst themselves, allowing for flexibility within their established "rules."

In many ways, Jones employs what feminist, ethicist, and psychologist Carol Gilligan describes as an "ethics of care." Gilligan's research demonstrates that women and girls tend to apply an "ethics of care" that revolves around "relationships and responsibilities" rather than "rights and rules."[355] In privileging relationships and responsibilities over pre-determined rules, Jones cultivates an infrastructure of engagement, accountability, and flexibility while avoiding authoritarianism. As she has said, "This stuff comes in front of the whole group, because the life lessons must continue."[356] Despite having the boundary or rule that no group member can attend

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[353] O'Leary, Tsui, and Ruch, "The Boundaries," 143.
[354] Ibid., 146.
[355] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
[356] Jones interview, November 8, 2018.

rehearsals under the influence, the participant in the story above was permitted to continue with the show because the entire group decided it.

In contrast to "distancing behaviors" that O'Leary et al. warn social workers to avoid, Jones' process demands rigorous engagement in times of crisis from everyone – including herself. This high level of engagement serves as a reminder to the participants that, put simply, she cares about them. Despite conflict, the group will go on. Fawcett et al. assert that "the problem of power" can be averted when the expert allows herself "to be open to challenge" and asserts that participants will only feel comfortable "exposing feelings and vulnerabilities" when they trust in the interpersonal relationships of the group.[357] Jones establishes this kind of trust through her workshop process, positioning herself within the group as equally vulnerable. This allows for a certain amount of directness when conflict arises and allows participants to view conflict more confidently. They know that they are safely housed within a structure that will not abandon them in tough times. They understand that when conflicts arise or boundaries are transgressed, participants will retain their agency because being part of these difficult discussions is compulsory.

Jones refuses to act as the sole leader, asking participants to mindlessly do as they are told. Instead, participants learn to make work within their relationship to the group. Participants view uncertainty as being ripe for conversations with other participants and are able to recognize their agentic role within the process. This directly conflicts with other models of training where the director takes on the exclusive role of sole decision maker with a general and rigid set of responses.

[357] Fawcett et al., *Practice and Research,* 97.

In this way, Jones defies traditional ideologies surrounding "professionalism" and "expertise" that favor single individuals as the ultimate authority figure. In "Rethinking *Professional* Practice: The Contributions of Social Constructionism and the Feminist 'Ethic of Care,'" Nigel Parton calls "professionalism" a "tradition of abstract and instrumental reasoning where the pursuit of knowledge is intertwined with the pursuit of control."[358] Similarly, in "Deconstructing and Reconstructing Professional Expertise," Jan Fook states that modernist legitimations of professional expertise require the expert to maintain social control over the knowledge they possess.[359] Professional expertise, Fook notes, is often verified through a framework that tends to be masculinist, reinforcing a "unified notion of the ideal, [in which] diversity is often othered and devalued, [and] the personal becomes silenced."[360]

Jones' expertise, on the other hand, defies patriarchal conceptions of authority. Jones' professional ethics hinges on the personal, centers Black women, and draws from a variety of disciplines that she adapts to her needs – creating new theories of knowledge with each exercise she develops. Through the cultivation of an ever-expanding toolkit, Jones applies a dynamic and malleable training process that invites participants to take on substantial leadership roles – as they are, in many ways, responsible for informing these newly formed practices. Jones shares facilitator duties with several women that she met on the inside who now participate in her work with other formerly incarcerated women.

Similarly, members who have worked with Sarah Chalmers have gone on to lead their own performance-based reentry program with Civic Ensemble. As Chalmers says, "I can still facilitate sometimes, but my ideal would be for Tony [a ReEntry participant] to facilitate and

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[358] Nigel Parton, "Rethinking 'Professional' Practice: The Contributions of Social Constructionism and the Feminist 'Ethics of Care'" (*The British Journal of Social Work* 33, 1, 2003), 1.
[359] Fook, "Deconstructing and Reconstructing," 107.
[360] Ibid., 110.

even direct a play sometime, or someone else might lead some games..."[361] Fook calls this type of expertise "transferrable." Similar to the ethics of care described by Gilligan that resists ways of knowing based on "particularity and concreteness," Jones' approach opens up pathways for creating new forms of knowledge, ones in which the participants can share in the responsibility of creating and ultimately facilitating.

Fook asks the question, "How does the expert practitioner maintain the will to constantly recreate theory, and keep themselves open to new situations, all while juggling conflicts?"[362] This is an especially relevant question for the facilit*auteur* who may find herself spending far more time accommodating participants than being a participant in the process herself. Sarah Chalmers identifies these moments as times when she has not set boundaries for herself: "When I start to feel angry because I have all of the responsibility and none of the reward, I know I haven't set up the room properly."[363]

Chalmers finds that in order to set boundaries in the room she must actively switch gears between serving as a "facilitator" and a "director." Chalmers divides her rehearsal process into two parts: the exploratory phase, where she is a "facilitator," and the rehearsal phase, where she is a "director." When the group moves into the rehearsal phase, Chalmers discusses with the ensemble the shift that might be felt in the room. She tells them that with her changing role the room might feel more hierarchal and less casual. Chalmers then details a situation in a community-based play where, despite her having set up expectations for the participants, one of her longtime participants expressed feeling ignored. The longtime participant did not feel as if any parts of her story had made it into the final script. It then became necessary for Chalmers to

[361] Sarah Chalmers, interview by author, January 8, 2019.
[362] Fook, "Deconstructing and Reconstructing," 118.
[363] Ibid.

actively say, “I am shifting into the role of facilitator,” stop rehearsal, and discuss the situation with the group.

Although this is one way of setting a boundary, Chalmers still recounts crying as soon as the participants left the room. Despite one’s best efforts, when the work necessitates a personal investment, *emotional* boundaries are hard to set. In asking Jones how she takes care of herself, she says, “I write to myself, I have my own little secret notebook,” she does yoga and believes in stretching, but overall, as she states, “If I'm feeling like crying, I'll cry. I'll just cry.”[364]

Conclusion

There's some magic about the Medea methodology that is unexplainable, actually. It's unexplainable and you can't understand it unless you're in it.[365] – Angela Wilson

There is a new world coming. Women are stepping out in front. We've always been here…That's the kind of stuff that feeds my work and I feel like I'm a part of that. I'm on that trajectory. The community-based work has to be like that…I feel like women have not gotten their just due yet.[366] – Rhodessa Jones

Jones’ model of theater-making has broad-reaching implications, especially for women. In *Practice and Research in Social Work*, Jan Fook writes, “The main challenge which thus arises for social work, is one of how processes of professionalization can incorporate, and privilege, different gendered experiences, given that the road to legitimacy is very much defined in masculinist terms.”[367] As Fook explains, the systems of power in place now are only understood through already-established systems of power – in other words, a revolving door of power reification. Within theater, what is professional is understood within the context of theories of knowledge that have long since been established and guarded by men. Even when one

[364] Jones interview, March 12, 2019.
[365] Wilson, “Once Upon a Time.”
[366] Rhodessa Jones, interview by author, November 8, 2018.
[367] Fook, 109.

tries to disrupt these theories of knowledge, they are only legible as disrupted through the framework of expertise that is already in place. In other words, resistance always acknowledges, and in some ways reifies, the structures it resists.

For Jones, reifying systems of power is not only something she refuses to perpetuate: she actively resists it. In speaking about her process, Jones says, "it's like reinventing the world all the time. I always would have a very warm, kitchen almost feeling…where everybody's cooking."[368] From a specifically directorial point of view, creating this warm kitchen space where everyone is cooking requires Jones to adjust her process to the rules of the jail, the varied needs of the incarcerated participants, and, if there is a performance the group is working towards, very real and expedient production timetables. In short, Jones is constantly navigating new and untold obstacles in her effort to transform the physical space of the institution into a sacred space where participants can explore their trauma. To this end, Jones has created a "grab bag" of sorts from her varied performance training which she then reimagines (in conjunction with her participants) in an effort to create a space that allows for vulnerability to be expressed but safely contained, all the while keeping an eye toward the highest level of theatricality.

Effinger-Crichlow argues that in some respects, Jones' position as a performance artist has placed her on the outside of a traditional theater community, but it has also afforded her the opportunity to explore more pioneering forms of performance.[369] I argue that Jones has explored not only pioneering forms of performance, but pioneering methodologies in creating performances, as well.

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[368] Rhodessa Jones, "Feminist Directions" (roundtable, Department of Performing and Media Arts, Cornell University, May 16, 2019).
[369] Effinger-Crichlow, *Staging Migrations,* 208.

Trauma-informed theater practices can require a great deal of flexibility. As Jones argues, such practices involve the facilitator first and foremost taking care of themselves. Jones' best practices for creating a trauma-informed space include:

Establishing ground rules;

Affirming people's thoughts and feeling;

Taking stock of one's own biases;

Being honest with oneself;

Coming from a place of neutrality (non-judgmental);

Welcoming folx into the circle and making sure they are comfortable;

Making sure participants know you are listening;

Developing transparency and trust; and,

Working out issues with each other.[370]

Jones says a phrase she often uses in her group is, "I'm sorry that happened to you. What do you need from us right now?"[371]

While theater makers such as Jones are not therapists, it is the responsibility of the facilit*auteur* to establish a rehearsal room culture that allows for the safe exchange of vulnerability. Because the fact is, *any* rehearsal room (professional or not) has the potential to traumatize its participants. In *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings, 2000–2010*, Cherríe Moraga describes a rehearsal room experience: "Gabriel is suddenly overcome with tears. He breaks down right there on the stage floor. A moment later, he has quickly recovered himself, laughing nervously, 'I didn't know this was gonna be therapy.' But it is not therapy. 'Therapy' is a privatized gringo concept that our illness is somehow individual as is our

[370] "Arts Facilitator Best Practices" workshop.
[371] Ibid.

cure."[372] While I don't advocate for theater practitioners to go around claiming themselves to therapists (unless, of course, they are), I have often heard the phrase "theater is not therapy" used to create firm boundaries; to, in essence, allow the director to make a distinction between what kinds of exchanges will be fruitful to the artistic process and what kinds of exchanges will not.

Legitimizing what is therapy and what isn't through the lens of certain forms of knowledge de-professionalizes and negates the responsive work of practitioners such as Jones and the process of passing down these theories of knowledge to participants. Without negating therapy as work that demands the rigors of training, I argue that it is important for practitioners to interrogate their reasoning for cutting off certain interactions with participants and to question whether they have established a responsive rehearsal room that can contain rehearsal room dynamics that sometimes move off script, demanding flexibility from the facilit*auteur*.

In addition, as theater continues to interrogate its inclusivity problem, Jones' process establishes a dynamic approach to developing new creative practices while training her participants to take on leadership positions within the group. In a 2020 *HowlRound* article, "The Work of the Imagination," director Tamilla Woodard writes:

> While we're at it, can we acknowledge that access is not just an issue of marginalized audiences but also about marginalized artists? Can we please stop talking about a pipeline that only presupposes a fixed access point, moving in a rigid direction, which offers limited resources and a narrow conduit to success? It's the same as having a "seat at the table." Let's take away the table, which is limited real estate. Instead, we can gather in an infinitely widening circle.[373]

As Woodard advocates, Jones' process takes away the "table" and instead creates systems of knowledge (i.e., engages in a flexible and responsive artistic practice that she develops into best practices) that are resistant to a fixed and guarded expertise. Instead, her process

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[372] Cherrié Moraga and Celia Herrera Rodriguez, *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings, 2000-2010* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 49.
[373] Tamilla Woodard, "The Art of Imagination." *HowlRound,* October 20, 2020.

dismantles the "pipeline" and instead invites anyone and everyone into the circle. Once there, participants become an integral part of the development process and eventually have the opportunity to become leaders within the group. Jones' participants gain their own kind of specialized knowledge that they capitalize on in different ways. Wilson, for example, is now in a supervisory position at the same corrections facility where she was once housed, and she's earning a college degree. She and Felicia Scaggs, another formerly incarcerated core member of The Medea Project, were recently awarded a scholarship to the renowned American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.). Scaggs says she owes her success to The Medea Project: "My life has totally changed. I should be dead…it feels really good to be on the other side."[374]

Unlike traditional theater models where success is measured in accolades and an actor's (or director's) capacity to get work on bigger and bigger theatrical stages, Jones' participants apply their theatrical expertise to developing generative and structured personal and professional relationships. The expertise Jones provides and develops in conversations with participants lives in the world, well beyond the stage. At the same time, her process provides access and a deep engagement with theater.

In the closing sequence of *When Did Your Hand Become a Weapon?*, the performers used Jones' hand dancing methodologies as they emerged from behind the curtain, each adding a line of dialogue to a progressively building chant. The actors slowly entered the audience, one by one, eventually forming a semi-circle in the front of the stage. Some lines were spoken together, some by individuals. As the ensemble approached the stage their movements became intertwined. As the chant was repeated it got louder and louder until it finally hit a crescendo and

[374] Felicia Scraggs, "Once Upon a Time in A Place Called Now: An Interactive Storytelling Workshop for Artists, Activists, and Educators," Film Forum, Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts, Cornell University, October 20, 2022.

then simply stopped. Medea Project performances are the synthesis of Jones' process. A mix of the individual and the group, they contain established and newly created theatrical devices; examine conflicts and resolutions; and contain flexibility, transparency, and vulnerability. Jones' steady hand remains behind it all.

THE DRAMATURGICAL DIRECTOR: TISA CHANG
AUTHENTICITY WITHIN CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC TEXTS

In 1989, producer Cameron Mackintosh announced that he would be bringing his wildly successful London production of *Miss Saigon* – based on the opera *Madame Butterfly*[375] – to Broadway. *Miss Saigon* tells the story of Chris, an American GI, who falls in love with Kim, a Vietnamese orphan. The Broadway offering would include the show's original stars: Jonathan Pryce and Lea Salonga.[376] Pryce (a white actor) donned yellowface and taped his eyes to create a "slant"[377] in order to play the role of the Eurasian Engineer – a French-Vietnamese hustler who owns the bar/brothel where Kim works. Before Mackintosh was able to officially mount the production, he had to get casting approval by the Actors' Equity Association (AEA), a standard step in bringing an overseas production to the United States. During the initial stages of this process, the AEA took issue only with the absence of African American cast members in *Miss Saigon*, given the large number of African American veterans of the Vietnam War. Mackintosh agreed to recast some of the roles with Black actors. However, he held firm that his choice for the Engineer continued to be Pryce, noting that the musical's success would depend on him.[378] In response, Asian director Tisa Chang and producer Dominick Balletta wrote a letter to the AEA's Executive Director, Alan Eisenberg, stating: "The insensitivity of this action could only be compared to having the role of Boy Willie in *The Piano Lesson* (by August Wilson) portrayed by a man in blackface. It is a shame that Cameron Mackintosh and the AEA both believe that

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[375] Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan (1900) was written by David Belasco, adapted from John Luther Long's 1898 short story "Madame Butterfly." It served as the source material for the libretto of Giacomo Puccini's 1904 opera, *Madama Butterfly. Madame Butterfly* follows the story of a 15-year-old Japanese girl, Cio-Cio-Sa ("Butterfly"), and an American naval officer, Pinkerton. Pinkerton marries Cio-Cio-Sa and soon after leaves her behind to return to the United States. After a three-year absence, Pinkerton returns to Japan with his new wife. Upon meeting his son from Cio-Cio, Pinkerton expresses regret for leaving but cannot face his mistakes. Her life now destroyed, Cio-Cio commits suicide.
[376] Esther Kim Lee, *A History of Asian American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 183.
[377] Ibid., 182.
[378] Ibid., 183.

painting a Caucasian actor in yellow is an acceptable action…Equity is sending the following message to its minority members: We will support your right to work as long as your role is not central to the play."[379]

After Chang's letter was published, the controversy over *Miss Saigon* grew more contentious. In August 1990, AEA reversed its earlier decision and refused to approve Pryce's casting. Mackintosh claimed that being cajoled into recasting Pryce's role would "threaten freedom of artistic choice"[380] and published a show cancellation notice in the *New York Times,* calling the statement a "final decision in the light of Equity's repeated condemnation of our artistic decision on this production."[381] Many in the theater community supported Mackintosh's decision to pull the show. On the evening of the cancellation notice, over 140 members of AEA signed a petition asking the union to reconsider. Eventually, Asian performers were pushed out of the debate, with closed-doored meetings taking place exclusively between Mackintosh's team and AEA. Faced with the loss of 182 jobs for American cast and company members,[382] AEA gave in and allowed Pryce to perform.

In "Casting, Cross-Racial Performance, and the Work of Creativity," Dorinne Kondo argues that the 1990s, and more pointedly the *Miss Saigon* controversy, were marked by discussions surrounding casting and the role of *creative labor* (minoritarian actors playing themselves) versus *creative vision* (the wants and needs of the director and producers).[383] Ultimately, though, Kondo asserts that the debate comes down to one question: "Whose

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[379] Lee, *A History of Asian American Theatre,* 183.
[380] Ibid., 188.
[381] Mackintosh quoted in Lee, *A History of Asian American Theatre*, 188.
[382] Lee, *A History of Asian American Theatre,* 188.
[383] Dorinne Kondo, "Casting, Cross-Racial Performance, and the Work of Creativity," in *Casting a Movement: The Welcome Table Initiative*, eds. Claire Syler and Daniel Banks (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 176.

imaginations and whose ways of being in the world are realized onstage?"[384] Kondo writes, "*Miss Saigon* has fostered multiple generations of Asian American actors who boast Broadway experience. Yet they have honed their acting, singing, and dancing chops while playing hypersexual, sleazy pimps and prostitutes, lotus blossoms who sacrifice themselves for white men, asexual cadres, and Oriental hordes submissive to Oriental despots."[385] In Kondo's view, the issue is not whether Asian actors are being cast as leading or supporting roles. The issue is that Asian characters have historically perpetuated stereotypes against Asians.

Over thirty years later, the *Miss Saigon* controversy remains a powerful emblem of theater's ongoing pursuit of "authentic" representation – and its frequent failure in this effort. These instances range from the egregious casting of white actors in roles specifically written for BIPOC characters[386] to perfunctory aesthetic measures such as casting any Black or Brown person in the role of a culturally specific character. Representation can be further complicated by questions of creative freedom. Torange Yeghiazarian, Founding Artistic Director of Golden Thread Productions, the first American theater company focused on the Middle East, asks, "When does authenticity get in the way of creativity?"[387] While Yeghiazarian advocates for opportunities for Middle Eastern artists, she says that limiting oneself to writing about or only playing characters from one's culture creates a "cultural ghetto where a community of color is only permitted to represent its own."[388]

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[384] Ibid.
[385] Ibid.
[386] Examples include: 2015 *Mikado* production: Lawrence Downes, "'The Mikado' Is Beheaded in New York;" 2015 Clarion University production of *Jesus in India*: Joe Gambino, "University Cancels Production of Jesus in India After Playwright Voices Concern Over Casting of White Actors;" 2015 Ohio University production of *The Mountaintop*: Amanda Holpuch, "Casting of White Actor as Martin Luther King Prompts Outrage from Playwright."
[387] Torange Yeghiazarian, "ReOrienting: A Middle Eastern American Casting Case Study," in *Casting a Movement: The Welcome Table Initiative*, eds. Claire Syler and Daniel Banks (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 70.
[388] Ibid.

This sentiment has been echoed in the interviews I have done with directors of color, such as Tamilla Woodard, who says that several of her colleagues have primarily been asked to direct plays that align with their identity: "I think sometimes the way diversity is sought is in a very limited way."[389] In reference to the diversity of regions, cultures, and identities that "Middle Eastern" implies, Yeghiazarian says that "The most important consideration is to work with a producer, director, dramaturg – a creative decision-maker – who is knowledgeable about the region."[390] Yeghiazarian, describing her job as providing "access points" into Middle Eastern culture, notes that because of limited casting choices, she often works with non-Middle Eastern actors. In making these casting decisions, she asks herself, "When does a play need the unspoken, indescribable cultural truth that only someone from the culture can bring; and when is there an opportunity to facilitate an actor's entry into a whole new cultural experience?"[391]

Similarly, Tisa Chang works with actors from the Pan Asian spectrum and often distinguishes her work from that of other groups by highlighting "the cultural specificity and the cultural distinctiveness"[392] of regions through telling stories of specific cultural events.

As a model for culturally specific and intercultural theater-making, Chang has been a central figure in Asian theatrical representation since the late 1950s. As a proponent of Asian visibility, Chang's life's work has been to disrupt Orientalist ideologies through culturally specific projects, representative bodies onstage, and her investment in dramaturgical research by way of design, music, and movement. In directing and producing intercultural performances, Chang is often positioned as an insider *and* outsider to the cultures she presents. Chang also often works with actors from outside the culture being presented (for example, a Korean actor

[389] Woodard interview.
[390] Yeghiazarian, "ReOrienting," 70.
[391] Ibid., 69.
[392] Tisa Chang, interview by author, February 1, 2020.

may play a Japanese character). While her experience as an Asian American informs her work, she also relies on research, dramaturgy, and movement to create a culturally-specific landscape. With a strong investment in authentic representation, Chang's process involves cultivating the play's culture within the rehearsal room so that the actors may have an embodied cultural experience in which to inform their performance – a directing methodology she calls "cultural immersion."[393]

In many ways, Chang approaches her rehearsal rooms by creating a sort of "living dramaturgy" for the actors to inhabit. Chang relies on actors' bodies – physicalizing characters within the given cultural circumstances of the play – to assist in adding cultural specificity to the performance. Chang says that she finds the emotional resonance of the text through movement, music, and the actors' interaction with their environment. "I really look for people who enjoy the freedom of exploring all kinds of walks, stances, postures, being able to express oneself, perhaps, without words. Sometimes, I'll put them through an exercise where they can create a character just from movement, and without speaking, before they even add words, so that some extreme emotions can be fulfilled with body language."[394]

In Chang's 2019 Cornell University masterclass workshop titled "(Directing) Through the Pan Asian Mirror," Chang worked with students and community members on her approach to staging Shahid Nadeem's play, *Acquittal,* set in a women's prison in 1980s Pakistan. Chang's process revolved heavily around physicalizing the characters. Although the workshop was fairly brief (90 minutes), she focused much of her time paying close attention to how the actors walked, sat down, and looked around the room. She would often coach them from the sidelines, asking them to imagine the temperature of the room, the last time they ate, and their relationship

[393] Chang interview, September 21, 2022.
[394] Chang interview, February 1, 2020.

to the other women. Although none of the participants in the workshop had the specific experience of being oppressed and imprisoned (or even perhaps Pakistani), Chang asked the students to build the dramaturgy of the environment and find the culturally-specific aspects of their character through the interaction with this well-defined landscape.

By providing circumstances in which the actors could immerse themselves into a given cultural environment, Chang helped them resist inscribing stereotypical ideals onto their characters. To a large degree, Chang's process for selecting plays she commissions, develops, and/or directs is imbedded in her directorial process. Her projects tend to focus on an intercultural subject – a character who navigates multiple cultures. Without being able to point to one cultural identifier and say "this is Chinese" or "this is Cambodian" or "this is American," actors are encouraged to live in the in-between spaces of culture. In this way, Chang asks actors to humanize their characters *through* the cultures they encounter rather than try to build culture on top of a "neutral" subject.

By examining Chang's process of creating a "living dramaturgy," we gain insight into how directors might approach a culturally-specific work without inadvertently erasing specific cultural markers or relying on stereotypical cultural tropes. ("Culturally specific," as defined by Daniel Banks, may include ethnicity, color, heritage, gender, sexuality, class, region, ability, and age.[395]) Chang demonstrates that culture is experiential, situational, and, within the context of intercultural identities, often demands a reimagining of what authentic representation even means. Mining the dramaturgical methods Chang follows may provide blueprints for thoughtfully, competently, and ethically approaching working with otherness.

[395] Claire Syler and Daniel Banks, eds., *Casting a Movement: the Welcome Table Initiative* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 229.

It is important to note that in conceiving this chapter I had planned to observe Chang's rehearsal process for her 2020 revival of *Cambodia Agonistes.* However, like most theater it was indefinitely postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, I am relying on multiple interviews with Chang, observations of her directing workshop as part of the Feminist Directions symposium, archival video of her directing projects, and reviews of her work. At times, I slip into close readings of the two productions being examined here – *Cambodia Agonistes* and *China Doll.* As I articulate later in the chapter, Chang's directorial process and the work she chooses very much inform each other. Because I relied heavily on archival video, my analyses of Chang's directing are often done through the work of the actors onstage. While acting and directing are in themselves separate disciplines, it is part of my overall argument that when a facilit*auteur* sets up the rehearsal room properly, the work of the actor and director are intertwined.

Tisa Chang: Through the Pan Asian Mirror

I never thought of myself as a feminist, I never thought of myself as a pioneer or a revolutionary. However, just by doing the work that I was doing in the 70s, breaking new ground, daring to adapt and extract and deconstruct…I just never even stopped to think…I just never looked back. I said these are the things I want.[396] – Tisa Chang

Chang was born in 1941 in Chungking, the daughter of a Chinese diplomat and socialite from a wealthy banking family. When Chang was six years old, her father moved the family to New York City. Chang says that her father instilled in her a sense of discipline that she has brought to her work with Pan Asian: "He was very strict but what an amazing mind he had. The knowledge of five languages. So, he set the bar very high for us and instilled in us Confucian values. Meaning, we do the work first and complain last. You never shirk your duty. You are

[396] Tisa Chang, "Feminist Directions," roundtable, Department of Performing and Media Arts, Cornell University, May 16, 2019.

always the first to arrive."[397] In the early days of Pan Asian Rep, Chang would support the company herself through her Broadway acting salary. She would often run between theaters (on the same night) to open a Pan Asian show before running over to perform in a Broadway production.[398]

Like many of the directors mentioned in this project, Chang honed her craft first through other disciplines. Chang studied piano, ballet, and Chinese dance as a child. After attending NYC's Performing Arts High School, she attended Barnard College, City College, and the Martha Graham School of Dance.[399]

> I went to the High School of Performing Arts…And we were really fortunate to be able to go see shows, plays, musicals. I was a music major, so going to Carnegie Hall. But I think watching Martha Graham dance… one of her last performances, fewer towards the end of her life, was absolutely transforming. That was transformative because she was an artist that synthesized, not only movement, but she was actually a dramatic artist and she was a real artist to the core. I think Martha Graham, Ellen Stewart, really, really, and Uta Hagen, of course my acting teacher, really helped me define what I wanted to really do.[400]

Chang quickly found prominence as an actor-dancer on Broadway. However, she was sometimes relegated to "orientalist" roles. One of her first appearances was in *Lovely Ladies, Kind Gentlemen* (1970), a script based on John Patrick's adaptation of the 1951 novel by Vern Sneider, *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1953). The play ran for only three previews and nineteen performances. Because of its racist plotline and use of yellowface, members of the Oriental Actors of America protested the show's opening night. However, Chang was also featured in productions, such as *Pacific Overtures* (1976), that unified the aesthetics of East and

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[397] Patrick Pacheco, *Theatre: All the Moving Parts*: *Artistic Director Tisa Chang*, January 17, 2020, YouTube, 1:30, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vw9exdOfnE.
[398] Anne L. Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 111.
[399] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors,* 111.
[400] Chang interview, February 27, 2018.

West in ways that would prefigure Pan Asian's signature style. Chang also worked in film and television, including *Ambush Bay* (1966), *Escape from Iran* (1981), and *Year of the Dragon* (1985). Perhaps ironically, Chang used the salary she received for playing the role of Yen (a Vietnamese sex worker) in David Rabe's Broadway play *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel,*[401] to open Pan Asian Rep.

Chang directed her first stage production in 1973 at La Mama E.T.C. in New York City. La Mama's founder, Ellen Stewart, heralded as the "mother of Off-Off Broadway," had only three years earlier instituted La Mama Chinatown with internationalist artist Ching Yeh at the helm.[402] When Chang began working at La Mama she found that she did not have much in common with Yeh;[403] their "artistic aesthetics,"[404] she discovered, were very different. As Lee writes, "She [Chang] wasn't drawn to the avant-garde experiments and foreign-language productions that Ellen Stewart, Ching Yeh, and others at La Mama were focusing on. Chang wanted to make sure that her shows were accessible to all audiences, believing it would help change the perceptions of Asian people at the time."[405] Chang soon started her own company under the La Mama umbrella. Her Chinese Theater Group created intercultural performances that integrated traditional Chinese theater styles with American mainstream theater.

After a few years, Chang's and Stewart's artistic styles began to clash. In 1977, the Chinese Theater Group became an independent company, later renamed Pan Asian Repertory Theatre. Despite the split, Chang and Stewart maintained an amicable relationship that Lee

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[401] The Off-Broadway performance opened at The Public Theater on May 19, 1971. Chang took over the role of Yen from actor Victoria Racimo when it transferred to Longacre Theatre on Broadway in April 1977.
[402] Lee, *A History of Asian American Theatre,* 83.
[403] Ibid., 84.
[404] Ibid., 84.
[405] Ibid., 85.

describes as "complex," saying that some have compared it to one of mother and daughter.[406] Chang articulated her goals for the company to *The New York Times* reviewer Mel Gussow, stating, "I want to utilize my heritage to explore new theatrical forms – rather than to espouse my ethnicity. I also want to provide opportunity for Asian-American performers to work on the highest professional level. Sometimes American audiences find it jarring to see Orientals in predominantly white companies. We're experimenting by doing Western classics with an Asian company."[407]

In a January 2020 interview with Patrick Pacheco on CUNY TV's *THEATER: All the Moving Parts*, Chang states that one of the central reasons she started Pan Asian Repertory Theatre in 1977 was to display the talent of Asian actors. Lee writes that Chang wanted to "present a 'blend' of Eastern and Western theatre styles and worked towards mainstreaming her version of intercultural theatre."[408] In her interview with Pacheco, Chang says, "I wanted it to be all inclusive of Asia. I'm very proud of my heritage, which is China, but I also wanted to honor all the wonderful artists and all the other countries in Asia…China, Japan, India, the three root countries/cultures but also Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Middle East. So, it was very ambitious but that is why I wanted Pan Asian to be all inclusive."[409]

> Pan Asian was started to promote opportunities, access, and equality for Asian American artists in the American theater, and to introduce a whole body of work that had not been included in American literature and in the theater canon. So that's what we set out to do. So just doing the work and really being clear and knowing what the stories, those selected stories have to be told…that's an act of assertion.[410]

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[406] Ibid., 87.
[407] Ibid., 87.
[408] Ibid., 82.
[409] Patrick Pacheco, *Theatre: All the Moving Parts*: *Artistic Director Tisa Chang*.
[410] Chang, "Feminist Directions."

At age nine, Chang has said, she wanted to be the "Chinese 'Joan of Arc' and save my people."[411] In many ways, Chang emulates the ideals of Joan of Arc, being a consummate and dedicated advocate for Asian visibility within theater. As Anne Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow write, "Chang's mission became the creation and sustenance of Asian American theatre in New York City."[412] At the same time, Chang has, in some ways, become a martyr to a discipline that has historically marginalized theaters of color. Chang has been outspoken about the discrepancy in funding for her work versus other now-institutionalized theaters that were beginning at the same time as hers: "Injustice and unfairness really make me angry and we see it spelled out sometimes in the funding world. Theaters of color have been traditionally marginalized so that fundraising is very difficult for us."[413]

However, Chang acknowledges that remaining a relatively small company has allowed her to produce works that are important and relevant to the Asian American community. She notes that larger-budget theaters are often asked to give up a certain amount of artistic and creative freedom when they accept funding from substantial donors. Throughout her extensive career, Chang has remained vigilantly protective of keeping the creative control of Pan Asian Rep within the hands of Asian artists. She notes:

> I think it's very important to have a real balance, and understanding, and clarity of how the money comes in, but you know, ultimately, if you let somebody else pull the strings, it's just we've shot ourselves in the foot. It's just deflected everything that we set out to do. So, I think it's having that balance and that's one of the reasons why we're not as large as Roundabout or Manhattan Theater Club. Both of them, Todd Haynes and Barry Grove, I knew them in the eighties. So, they've come a really long way, but Barry said to me once, "Tisa, you're gonna have to give up something."…(H)e was our consultant for a while, and I guess I didn't take his advice very much to heart. I didn't want to give up on my values, or my beliefs, or my convictions, and how we do things…So that's one of the reasons that we are not as large as them.[414]

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[411] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors*, 111.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Patrick Pacheco, *Theatre: All the Moving Parts*: *Artistic Director Tisa Chang*.
[414] Chang interview, June 27, 2018.

Chang's productions directly challenge the commonplace practice of yellowface and the Orientalist content of plays such as *Madame Butterfly* and its successor, *Miss Saigon*. As she notes, "I think in those days yellowface was practiced rather prevalently. That's another reason why it fueled us in Pan Asian…"[415] In protest of productions that featured yellowface, Chang mounted the same productions using all-Asian casts, including John Patrick's *Tea House of the August Moon* (2000) and Fay and Michael Kanin's *Rashomon* (2002). Taking the Asian experience as a given, Chang imbued theater classics and historically white texts with the creative labor of Asian actors, including *A Servant of Two Masters* (which includes asides in each of the actors' native language), *Three Sisters* (set in Siberia), and *A Doll's House* (adapted for an Asian American family in Brooklyn).[416] In 1982, Pan Asian Rep produced *Yellow Fever*, written by Rick Shiomi. *Yellow Fever* follows the Canadian-Japanese gumshoe Sam Shikaze (based on Humphrey Bogart's character from the film noir classic *The Maltese Falcon),* integrating comedy, mystery, and Japanese political intrigue. *Yellow Fever* not only put Pan Asian Rep on the map (it toured across the U.S. and to Edinburgh), but it also solidified the company's place as an intercultural theater prepared to explore the interplay between Asian and Western culture.

Since beginning Pan Asian Rep, Chang has maintained her belief that Asian artists can play "any and all roles and be equally participatory in American theater."[417] Chang remains at the forefront of protesting through artmaking, most recently participating in a panel with

[415] Pacheco, *Theatre: All the Moving Parts*.
[416] Ibid.
[417] Ibid.

American Theatre Magazine to discuss attacks on Asian Americans during the COVID-19 crisis.[418]

Creating Meaning, a Dramaturgical Process: *Cambodia Agonistes*

> *It's so interesting that Pan Asian is a kind of Pan Asian ensemble of artists, with artists coming from different countries. But most of the countries are rooted in some very similar beliefs, religious beliefs, and cultural beliefs, and cultural celebrations. And of course, the languages are different, but an actor who is bilingual immediately has, I feel, another level of comprehension and energy, that we can all relate to and share."*[419] – Tisa Chang

Before the coronavirus shut down theaters in March 2020, Chang was working on a revisioning of *Cambodia Agonistes*, a play she helped develop in the early 1990s with her longtime collaborator, playwright Ernest Abuba. Integrating Cambodian rituals, songs, dance, and masks with Brechtian elements,[420] *Cambodia Agonistes* premiered in 1992 at Playhouse 46 and was revived at the West End Theatre in 2005. The 2020 revival – which is now indefinitely on hold – was supported by a $35,000 Award from the National Endowment for the Arts and would have marked Chang's first return to directing in several years. *Cambodia Agonistes* is set in 1970s Cambodia, during the civil war years, when the Khmer Rouge regime murdered millions of that country's people. The play revolves around a woman called "The Dancer" who escapes from captivity from "The Dictator" but is forced to leave her child behind. The 2005 program note states, "Through traditional Cambodian dance, puppetry and an original score of 20 musical numbers, *Cambodia Agonistes* tells the story of a traditional Cambodian dancer, suffering psychosomatic blindness, who is found wandering the streets of New York. In her

[418] Kelundra Smith, "Asians Under Attack: A Theatremakers' Round Table," *American Theatre Magazine*, April 7, 2021.
[419] Chang interview, February 1, 2020.
[420] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors*, 112.

attempt to overcome her personal horrors and her homeland's history she must make an enormous sacrifice."[421]

Cambodia Agonistes is representative of the type of work Chang often directs and champions at Pan Asian Rep. Chang asserts that, to her, cultural specificity involves telling stories that often go untold in American theater – especially as it pertains to significant events in Asian history. In my February 2020 interview, I asked Chang how she prepared her actors to work with culturally-specific texts, such as *Cambodia Agonistes*. Chang replied: "When I approach a culturally-specific project, it's not useful if they're just a museum piece. So, it is, again, always the collaboration between writer, director, actors, but the designers are particularly influential. So, these Cambodian-influenced styles of religious robes can be rather fanciful. It can be really artful."[422] Chang also notes that it is important to know when historical accuracy is needed and when she can "adapt, blossom, and embellish"[423] aspects of character, movement, and design.

Chang's assertation that it is "important to know when one can experiment, and how"[424] speaks to the ways in which Chang complicates the idea that "authentic" representation is the ultimate goal within a culturally-specific text. Instead, Chang honors what she calls the "root origins" of Asian culture through artfully designed elements. During both the 1992 and 2005 iterations of *Cambodia Agonistes,* Chang enveloped the rehearsal room in Cambodian culture so that her Pan Asian actors had the opportunity to *live within* the dramaturgy: in Chang's approach, the ways in which the actors work with and against culturally-specific design is how their characters come to be.

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[421] "Cambodia Agonistes," Program Notes, 2005, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
[422] Chang interview, February 1, 2020.
[423] Ibid.
[424] Ibid.

This type of "cultural immersion" is often delegated to the dramaturg, whose actual job description remains elusive, amorphous, and situational. In 1994, Marianne Van Kerkhoven (Belgian dramaturg and theater critic) argued that dramaturgy is not easily defined:

> It appeared…that dramaturgy involves everything, is to be found in everything, and is hard to pin down. Is it only possible to think of dramaturgy in terms of spoken theatre, or is there a dramaturgy for movement, sound, light and so on, as well? Is dramaturgy the thing that connects all the various elements of a play together? Or is it, rather, the ceaseless dialogue between people who are working on a play together? Or is it about the soul, the internal structure, of a production? Or does dramaturgy determine the way space and time are handled in a performance, and so the context and the audience too? We can probably answer these questions with "yes, but…".[425]

In *Dramaturgy and Performance,* Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt say that although dictionaries can give more precise definitions of the word, in theory and practice dramaturgy is a "fluid, flexible, encompassing, and expanded term."[426] Turner and Behrndt maintain that Van Kerkhoven's definition implies that dramaturgy is an overarching term for the "composition of the work" and the "collaborative process of putting the work together."[427] In other words, dramaturgs may research the specific cultural, social, political, and historical moments in the play, contextualize them for the other artists in the room, and ideally follows the work through the integration of design elements, embodied character work, and so on and so forth until the production is in performance.

Dramaturgy (as a discipline) is attributed to the work of G.E. Lessing who established the modern understanding of dramaturgy in his publication *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1767-9). In *Dramaturgy in Performance,* Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt note that Lessing wrote *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* during his residency as a playwright, critic, and artistic consultant at

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[425] Marianne Van Kerkhoven quoted in *Dramaturgy and Performance*, Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt (London: Palgrave, 2016), 21.
[426] Turner and Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance,* 21.
[427] Ibid.

the Hamburg National Theater.[428] Turner and Synne state, "*Hamburgische Dramaturgie* is essentially a collection of critical essays in which Lessing reflects not only on play composition, structure, acting and audience, but also on the state and future of German theatre and criticism."[429] In writing *Hamburgische Dramaturgie,* Lessing's aim was to develop a more rigorous discourse surrounding theater and to champion German theater as a serious "theatrical art."[430] While Lessing's objectives were not ultimately successful (Hamburg National Theater closed only two years after opening, and actors and theater managers declined to act on his criticism), they formed the basis for what we now know as the dramaturgical process.[431]

The "production dramaturg" emerged in the United States in the 1970s, coinciding with the rise of institutional (or regional) theaters. In *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theater,* Mary Lockhurst attributes the foundation of contemporary notions of dramaturgy to John Willet's 1965 translation of Bertolt Brecht's *Des Messingkauf* – musings on theater and the dramaturgical process, written between 1939-1955.[432] In October of 1963, the National Theatre was established in Britain and appointed the "first long-term, official literary manager in the United Kingdom," theater critic Kenneth Tynan.[433] Much of Brecht's dramaturgical theories trickled down to the West through Tynan's advocacy of Brecht's practice and through artists who had previously worked at Brecht's theater.[434] When dramaturgy entered academia – notably at the David Geffen

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[428] Ibid., 23.
[429] Ibid.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Ibid., 25.
[432] Mary Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy: a Revolution in Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 109.
[433] Katalin Trencsényi, *Dramaturgy in the Making: a User's Guide for Theatre Practitioners* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), 20.
[434] Lockhurst, *Dramaturgy: a Revolution,* 109

School of Drama's Dramaturgy Program, founded in 1977 (at what was then the Yale School of Drama) – the role of the production dramaturg began to spread to theaters.[435]

Embracing contemporary modes of performance-making, Katalin Trencsényi and Bernadette Cochrane's collection of essays, *New Dramaturgy: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*, gathers methods of dramaturgical processes that they assert expand on traditional dramaturgy – geared more towards script analyses and research – creating a new paradigm that "acknowledges the multitude of theories and aesthetics, and the diversity of practices"[436] within the discipline. *New Dramaturgy* accounts for practitioners, like Chang, who engage in dramaturgy through a less conventional approach. Chang's "cultural immersion process"[437] developed through necessity while working on *Cambodia Agonistes* in the early 1990s. Although Chang did not employ a formal dramaturg on the project, she did work with Cambodian dance specialists and community activists who helped shape the piece. Trencsényi and Cochrane call "new dramaturgy" a collective noun that shares three characteristics: "they are post-mimetic, they embrace interculturalism and they are process-conscious."[438]

In his essay "Dramaturgy in Postdramatic Times," Joseph Danan expands on the idea of "new dramaturgy" by arguing that theater – influenced by performance art, unhinged from a script – has entered the realm of "postdramatic theatre." Danan uses this phrase, "postdramatic" – coined by theater researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann – to include theatrical forms that do not privilege the primacy of the script, such as devised theater, dance, circus, and performance art. Danan also uses "postdramatic" to characterize theater's move towards "presentation" versus

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[435] Trencsényi, *Dramaturgy in the Making,* 110.
[436] Katalin Trencsényi and Bernadette Cochrane, eds., *New Dramaturgy: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), xii.
[437] Tisa Chang, interview by author, September 21, 2022.
[438] Trencsényi and Cochrane, *New Dramaturgy,* xii.

"representation," which he describes as giving full weight to the "present tense"[439] of theater, i.e. the *presence* of theater. Eschewing ideologies that theater can achieve (or should strive to achieve) a direct mimesis of life, "postdramatic" theater unhinges itself from a fixed place and focuses on the experience of the production itself – what the actors, director, designers, and so on bring to this stage at this particular time. Danan asserts that theater has shifted from being a system of signs that the audience must decode through contemplation to being an experience not much unlike any life event the spectator encounters.[440] In other words, theater is not trying to be something else; it is the thing itself. If, then, as Danan states, "Dramaturgy cannot be separated from playwriting or mise-en-scène, because it is the process which crosses between the one and the other, and connects them both,"[441] then in this increasing realm of theater as experience, the dramaturg is in position to facilitate meaning-making.

Although Trencsényi and Cochrane's analyses of new dramaturgy precedes Chang's praxis, there are many parallels that can be drawn between the new dramaturg/y and how Chang incorporates dramaturgical material into her rehearsal process. Trencsényi and Cochrane describe the "new dramaturg" as nearer to the center of creation, "sometimes so near that the role itself dissolves and is taken on by the company."[442] Unlike dramaturgical processes that can sometimes become siloed in the rehearsal process – dramaturgy is discussed during tablework and never again – the new dramaturg/y is ubiquitous. As Trencsényi and Cochrane explain, new dramaturgy embeds itself into the theater-making experience, demanding that every artist involved participate in researching or sharing experiences that inform the historical, cultural, and social contexts of the play.

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[439] Danan quoted in *New Dramaturgy*, 4.
[440] Danan quoted in *New Dramaturgy*, 7.
[441] Trencsényi and Cochrane, *New Dramaturgy,* 6.
[442] Ibid., xiii.

In the early days of Pan Asian Rep, the position of "dramaturg" had not quite infiltrated the zeitgeist of American theater. Additionally, Pan Asian Rep began as (and in many ways has remained) a scrappy company without the luxury of employing what was then an emerging position. Instead, Chang (as director) conducted most of the historical research, her designers created culturally specific clothing, landscapes, and music, and her company members added personal experiences. Chang invited region-specific dancers and community activists to rehearsal. Additionally, Chang brought in food from the play's specific area to share with the actors. As Chang explains, sharing food is an instrumental part of breaking down cultural barriers. "I find that sharing food, and learning more about another's culture through food, and eating is very collaborative. It breaks down a lot of walls and you really learn about people's personalities."[443] Chang's amalgamation of historical research, cultural specificity through design, music, dance, and food, along with the ensemble-driven dramaturgy of her Asian actors created a "living dramaturgy" for her artists to interact with throughout the rehearsal process.

In discussing preparations for what was to be a 2020 revisioning of *Cambodia Agonistes*, Chang says that she embarked on a great deal of dramaturgical research. For the 1992 production, she emphasized the impact of reading personal testimonies of survivors, specifically Haing Ngor's memoir, *A Cambodian Odyssey*. As she states, "And when we started, there's a great deal of reading that we had to do, to digest, and it's very hard. One of them was Haing Ngor's memoir, who survived the Pol Pot killing fields. It's very difficult reading, but studying all of that factored into the play."[444] Chang insists that maintaining the cultural specificity of the work demands a dance between acknowledging the horrors of the time period and not explicitly focusing on them. Instead, Chang creates a frame that highlights "The Dancer's" strength and

[443] Chang interview, February 1, 2020.
[444] Ibid.

ultimate survival. In this way, she engages in what might be thought of as a revisionist dramaturgy – seeking to add buried voices to a cultural landscape.

Chang insists that the culturally-specific dramaturgical elements (such as sets, costumes, and food) that make up the performance be brought in immediately for the actors to work with, enabling actors to inhabit their movement through their environment.[445] Working from what might now be called a "post-dramatic" framework, Chang does not try to build a perfect representation of a culturally-specific historical moment. Instead, her sets and costumes are often a gesture towards the culture. As Chang explains, sometimes she feels the necessity to replicate a specific cultural garb exactly (as with the Buddhist robes in *Cambodia Agonistes*) and sometimes she allows the costumes and sets to blend old and new, foregoing strict representation for something more presentational, something that is alive. The performance she creates is not about freezing a moment in time for her audience to examine at a distance – as she says, it is not a museum piece – but instead she strives to integrate culturally-specific elements onto the living landscape of the stage. Thus, the meaning created through her productions is a blend of historical accuracy and the live actors' bodies that occupy these spaces.

In "Time and a Mirror: Towards a Hybrid Dramaturgy for Intercultural-Indigenous Performance," Rachel Swain discusses the functions of dramaturgy in the work of Marrugeku, an intercultural dance theater company that devises works with Indigenous and non-Indigenous dancers that cross the aesthetic boundaries of a fixed temporal and spatial landscape.[446] Similar to the intercultural work Pan Asian Rep creates, Marrugeko "works in an Indigenous frame of

[445] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors*, 114.
[446] Rachel Swain, "Time and a Mirror: Towards a Hybrid Dramaturgy for Intercultural-Indigenous Performance," in *New Dramaturgy: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice,* eds. Katalin Trencsényi and Bernadette Cochrane (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 145.

cultural production that is also an intercultural frame, in a state of continuous negotiation."[447] Swain notes that an intercultural frame is slippery, changing, and in constant negotiation between the cultures being presented and how those cultures blend together. Because of this cultural exchange amongst members of the group, Swain proposes that "dramaturgy is practiced by a range of collaborators" and is "more concerned with dramaturgy than the role of the dramaturg."[448] Marrugeku's dramaturgy comes in the form of "clusters" of practitioners who offer "areas of specialist knowledge" including "indigenous custodians who have contributed a specific dance or story, and invited guest artists who may have skills in writing, theatre craft or dance dramaturgy."[449]

Marrugeku forms a dramaturgical tapestry to bring back a culture that was stolen from Indigenous people. Similarly, Chang employs comparable dramaturgical tapestries – aesthetics of design – to bring back cultural elements that have been erased. In *Cambodia Agonistes,* Chang says she was inspired to incorporate a lot of Buddhist imagery which was banned during the Pol Pot genocide. As she says, "Cambodian life is very much rooted in their form of Buddhism, and religiosity is very, very strong. So, that's something that the Pol Pot genocide tried to erase…for this re-envisioning particularly, it gives us so many wonderful images to draw from for design and costuming."[450]

Chang calls dramaturgical research "one background aspect of the frame."[451] While Chang gives significant weight to historical analyses, she is more interested in how these cultural histories live in the body. In her description of intercultural indigenous dance, Swain outlines a

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[447] Ibid.
[448] Ibid., 147.
[449] Ibid., 147.
[450] Chang interview, February 1, 2020.
[451] Ibid.

"hybrid dramaturgy"[452] that celebrates "hybrid systems of knowledge." These systems of knowledge consciously expose "gaps and ambiguities" within (and are indicative of) "cultural negotiations."[453] These hybrid systems of knowledge resist a fixed cultural experience and instead point to a framework that is being constantly modified by its inhabitants. I ascribe the term "hybrid dramaturgy" to Chang's cultural world-building, wherein she demands that her intercultural actors immerse themselves in culturally-specific aspects of the play. In taking this type of hybrid dramaturgical approach, Chang de-centers her own cultural lens by inviting others to do the rigorous work of creating a specific cultural and historical lens in which to act.

Within this "hybrid dramaturgy" or "living dramaturgy" (as I am calling it) where the actors' bodies do much of the work of creating cultural meaning, Chang places a significant emphasis on character embodiment. Fliotsos and Vierow describe how Chang demands that her actors "stay in character throughout the rehearsal process."[454] Chang has stated that she does not enjoy spending large amounts of time doing script and character analyses with her actors on the outset of rehearsals. Instead, Chang engages with tablework throughout the process, weaving it into every aspect of rehearsals.

Discussions about history and culture are woven into character development. Chang's methods demand that actors first build culture onto their bodies. For *Cambodia Agonistes*, this included enacting the postures and movements of people who worked in fields and spent much of their day hunched over, harvesting crops. As the actors engaged in physical exercises, Chang discussed the circumstances of their characters, asking them to imagine how a body moves within an environment where people are overworked and deprived of their basic needs. What

[452] Swain, "Time and a Mirror," 145.
[453] Ibid., 149.
[454] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors,* 114.

begins as a fun exercise evolves into a more serious examination and discussion of the lives of Cambodian villagers living under an oppressive dictatorship. Chang believes that these important cultural discussions, paired with synonymous physical activity, allow for a more genuine cross-cultural embodiment. As many other directors in this project have attested, Chang has found that there is a strong link between informing embodiment in the moment versus trying to discuss cultural specificity and then enact it as a parallel gesture. In short, the embodiment simply does not attach itself as well. As Chang recounts:

> Once we get on our feet, I ask them [the actors] to find their feet, the posture, the stance, is so important. One, I was a former dancer, but I think it's also that Asian cultures are very comfortable kneeling, sitting, squatting. And so, there's a kind of freedom. And in Cambodia, these are villagers who are experiencing a deprivation. And I had them do an exercise, like the ewoks from Star Wars. They were basically never upright. They were always on their feet…it was a very interesting experiment, where it evolved from very, very exciting postures, and stances, and characterization. So again, the physicality of exploring one's own total body ability is a lot of fun, and it's very freeing. So, that's one of the reasons I really love culturally specific work.[455]

In *No Safe Spaces: Re-casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater*, Angela Pao states that "More than any other single element, the actor's physical presence on stage controls the production of meaning as his or her body becomes the most arresting point of intersection for visual, auditory, sociocultural, and ideological codes."[456] Pao argues that in any play, meaning-making is essentially inscribed on the actor's body. For cultural meaning to resonate with an audience, it must be visible through the character's physicalization. This same sentiment is echoed in Chang's 1995 article from *Backstage* entitled "Actor Training." Chang wrote that "voice and physical training are critical. I really believe in diverse techniques. If the English school of text and breathing and speech is considered a dictum for most actors, I would

[455] Chang interview, February 1, 2020.
[456] Angela Chia-Yi Pao, *No Safe Spaces: Re-Casting Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in American Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 27.

like to stress the physicality – the movement – of what I call world cultures. Being able to work in bare feet, without shoes, immediately puts the person in a different context."[457] In Chang's view, culture is carved onto the body and as such, the physicality of characters is what communicates cultural specificity – even if that specificity is meant to demonstrate the slipperiness of interculturalism.

In Chang's facilitation of a "dramaturgy for movement, sound, light and so on" that Van Kerkhoven suggests, design elements take on a cultural significance that allow for actors to engross themselves within a *practice* of cultural specificity. This culturally specific practice – wearing Cambodian costumes, dancing to Cambodian music, eating Cambodian food – creates, as Danan argues, an experience for the audience. This experience is created through these cultural inscriptions being translated by the actors who – through this living dramaturgy – embody a specific geography, history, and cultural distinctiveness. In other words, the dramaturgy is the vehicle for cultural exchange between actors and their characters. Historical markers, culturally-specific design elements, and embodying the environment coalesce to make something intangible, tangible for the audience.

Cultural Specificity as Authenticity: *China Doll*

> *I'm very proud to be Chinese. I had to leave China when I was a very young child, before the Communist Revolution, so I'm very, very connected to my homeland. And that root connection has been always very important and informed many of the works. So, the foundation, of course, stands for, reflects all of Asia. That diversity means we have an endless source of material. So, I feel very privileged.* – Tisa Chang[458]

Chang's work often revolves around cultural specificity as it pertains to interculturalism. As Chang states, her aim is to point to culturally-specific moments in history, bringing forth culturally-specific markers of the geography, religion, and time period. This goal is

[457] Tisa Chang, "Actor Training," *Backstage* Archives, 1995.
[458] Tisa Chang, "Feminist Directions," roundtable, May 16, 2019.

simultaneously paired with her desire to highlight intercultural experiences, by staging classic Western plays with Asian casts and commissioning/adapting plays that purposefully intersect with two or more cultures. For Chang, there is specificity to be had within intercultural performances. However, that specificity is slippery. It involves encompassing cultural specificity while demonstrating that there is an in-between space that intercultural bodies navigate. This in-between space can be specific but also muddy and situational. As Chang states in *American Women Stage Directors*, she believes theater must "reflect truthfully"[459] but also "theatricalize the unspeakable"[460] and overall "must represent magic."[461] In short, the *authenticity* of intercultural experiences comes from blurring culturally specific lines.

An exemplary model of Chang's presentation of intercultural blurriness was the 2005 production of *China Doll* by Elizabeth Wong. The play is based on the life of silent film star Anna May Wong (Wong Liu Tsong), a contemporary of Uta Hagan, who rose to fame playing the "exotic" mistress of white male leads in the 1920s and 1930s. Similar to Chang's own experiences, Anna May found herself caught between two cultures – Chinese and American – not quite being fully accepted into either. Despite a long career in film and theater, Wong was disillusioned with playing stereotypical supporting Asian roles. In 1935, Anna May desperately wanted the lead role, O-Lan, in the film version of Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*. Anna May's dream of playing an "authentic" Asian character was ultimately dashed when Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer cast Luise Rainer (a white actress in yellowface) instead. In *China Doll*, Elizabeth Wong ends the play with Anna May spending her remaining years teaching white actors how to "authentically" embody western ideals of Asian "authenticity."

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[459] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors,* 111.
[460] Ibid., 112.
[461] Ibid., 114.

China Doll jumps through time, beginning with an older, fur-clad Anna May asking her tenant to fetch her some gin from the corner store (the real Anna May turned her Santa Monica home into apartments she called "Moongate Apartments"). The older Anna May dons a nightgown, a can't-quite-place-it French-inspired accent, and a penchant for name dropping. As the play develops, the audience sees the life of Anna May unfold. The play focuses much of its attention on the entertainment industry. Anna May auditions for what she believes would be a breakthrough film role – an Asian "concubine" – telling the director, "I'll do anything to play the slave girl."[462]

As this poignant line indicates, Anna May's acting career hinges on her ability to play the exotic ingénue, forced to wear see-through negligées, representing an Anglo fetishization of Asian apparel. As Anna May's star rises, she tries to play "Asian" more authentically but is told to be "more jasmine, more sandalwood,"[463] a coded expression often directed at Asian women to be softer and more subservient. After achieving a modicum of long-sought fame, Anna May goes on a one-year tour of China looking for work and is told, "you are too American to play Chinese."[464] Eventually, she becomes an "exotic teacher" instructing a young white actress on how to physically embody a Chinese character,[465] telling her student to look downwards and move through the world as if "no matter what you do you're never good enough."[466] And, as if directly speaking back to *Miss Saigon's* Orientalist plot narrative that Mackintosh called "a tragic love story in which a young woman sacrifices her life to ensure that her Amerasian son may find a better life in America,"[467] *China Doll's* Anna May teaches her young white ingénue

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[462] *China Doll* (2005 Archives), New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
[463] Ibid.
[464] Ibid.
[465] This part of the play is based on *The Good Earth's* casting of a white actor, Luise Rainer, in the role of O-Lan.
[466] *China Doll* (2005 Archives).
[467] Lee, *A History of Asian American Theatre,* 193.

how to play "exotic" by repeating the following lines of elocution: "A good Chinese must step aside, have downcast eyes, and commit suicide."[468]

China Doll exemplifies Chang's interest in moving past representation for representation's sake and into what she calls "cultural specificity" and "cultural distinctiveness." In discussing whether or not the urgency of representation has changed since she began her company, she says:

> …I think there are some more opportunities that have opened. But for serious dedicated work that can highlight and feature an ensemble of leading artists, I think those plays and projects are still, well, we still have some ways to go…some of the other artistic directors are thinking of more integration. Whereas I've always felt that I wanted to highlight the cultural specificity and the cultural distinctiveness of our artists and our projects. And this sort of ties in with why I choose the themes of our projects and highlight momentous crossroads in a specific culture...[469]

In *Casting for a Movement,* Daniel Banks says that "Cultural specificity challenges the colonial projects of assimilation and acculturation. To be culturally specific is to be at risk in a country that has built itself socially and economically on the virtues of submitting (or dedicating oneself) to a new, mainstream, 'American' culture."[470] Banks is specifically referring to earlier casting movements (which are still very much prevalent) that call for "nontraditional casting" or "color-blind casting" – movements that Shakespeare scholar Ayanna Thompson calls "unstable." Asking "What constitutes a blindness to race?" Thompson asserts that it is not possible to overlook one's heritage.[471] As Banks says, "To erase color is to erase identity and legacy' to recognize and appreciate our differences is to know and honor one another's histories and stories."[472]

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[468] *China Doll* (2005 Archives).
[469] Chang interview, February 1, 2020.
[470] Syler and Banks, *Casting a Movement,* 229.
[471] Thompson quoted in *Casting a Movement*, 15.
[472] Syler and Banks, *Casting a Movement,* 15.

Chang's emphasis on cultural embodiment through creating a "living dramaturgy" reflects her desire to disrupt not just stereotypes but the ways in which these stereotypes have been accepted as true or "real." In "Keeping It Real Without Selling Out," Venus Opal Reese argues that although there are more roles for Black actors today, the roles are for the "same sort of 'blacks' that have been circulated and disseminated since *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Transatlantic Minstrelsy."[473] As she argues, "Realism is still the dominant form of acting training in America; what people believe is real about 'black people' is what roles are written, what plays get produced throughout the U.S., and what is taught in schools."[474]

In contrast to representative realism, Reese describes her notion of embodiment that sits at the "intersection of personal history" and "collective memory."[475] Reese says that people of African ancestry have adapted to survive in a world that perpetually reinscribes "servitude, social death, and erasure."[476] Embodiment, then, is not an adaptation but a deconstruction. As she argues, once something has been taken apart, it loses its charge and can be put back together in a way that suits the deconstructionist. As Reese states, this act of deconstructing a historical stereotype allows the actor to free themselves of the rage associated with the perpetuations of these characterizations and instead gives the actor access to "ways of bringing the history of hurt, pain, betrayal, sacrifice, love, and disgust to *any* role created – purposefully, powerfully, authentically."[477]

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[473] Venus Opal Reese, "Keeping It Real Without Selling Out: Toward Confronting and Triumphing Over Racially-Specific Barriers in American Acting Training," in *The Politics of American Actor Training*, eds. Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud (New York: Routledge, 2010), 165.
[474] Ibid.
[475] Ibid.
[476] Ibid.
[477] Reese, "Keeping It Real," 166.

In her production of *China Doll*, Chang demonstrates that assimilation is an embodied practice. *China Doll* deconstructs the costs of coercing Asian actors to perpetuate Asian stereotypes, highlighting the physical toll this task takes on Anna May's body. In one scene, Anna May is confronted with the loss of her mother. Her father asks Anna May to fly home to China for the funeral, which happens to be the same date as Anna May's Broadway opening. Chang stages this scene with Anna May positioned in the middle of the stage, facing outward, her father to her left and her co-star, the white actress Uta Hagan, to the right. Uta Hagan glides through her small circle of light as she prepares for the show. Her father seems heavy in comparison, clearly weighed down by grief. As Anna May tries to convince her father to move the funeral (she ultimately misses it altogether in favor of her Broadway opening), she is emotionally pulled between these two worlds. Chang stages this moment as a physical representation of a cultural purgatory. At this point in the play, Anna May has changed her speech, erasing any traces of a Chinese accent. She tries to mimic the mannerisms of Uta Hagan but they come off as too eager and inauthentic.

In *National Abjection: the Asian American Body on Stage* (2002), Karen Shimakawa complicates the premise that an authentic representation of Asian identity is possible. In describing plays that distinguish "fake" stereotypes with "actual experiences, traditions, and achievements of 'real' Asian Americans,"[478] Shimakawa writes: "Plays employing this strategy juxtapose those representations positioning Asian Americanness-as-abject (racially, culturally, sexually, and nationally aberrant) against representations of 'real' Asian Americans who personify the diametrically opposing antistereotype. This strategy may be useful and effective in countering repressive, racist stereotypes by offering alternative ways of seeing Asian American

[478] Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: the Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 100.

bodies and lives; however, it is at best a partial response, one fraught with its own complications and limitations."[479] Shimakawa argues that the "fake"/"real" litmus test of representation may end up inadvertently supporting racist discourses that homogenize Asian identity.[480] And, in adopting a wholesale representation in opposition to stereotypes, a new "perhaps equally fake"[481] stereotype is established. Furthermore, Shimakawa warns against adopting binary systems of "fake"/"real" "bad/"good" "us/"them" that tend to reiterate and revalidate the categories of "West/East, occident/orient, American/not-American"[482] that in turn tend to leave out representations of interethnic, intercultural, intergenerational, and cross-gender Asian Americans.

The quest for authenticity is perhaps as much about the subject being evaluated as it is about the authenticator. In her book about German folklore, *In Search of Authenticity*, Regina Bendix states that "Declaring something authentic legitimated the subject that was declared authentic, and the declaration in turn can legitimate the authenticator, though here such concerns as social standing, education, and the ability to promote one's view also play a role."[483] Like Shimakawa, Bendix complicates the role of the "authenticator" in deciding what is and is not authentic. Historically speaking, authorities on what is "real," Bendix points out, have a high "social standing," significant "education," and a platform in which to "promote one's view."[484] During the *Miss Saigon* controversy producer Cameron Mackintosh, director Nicholas Hytner, and actor Jonathan Pryce – with their multiple accolades and notable theater pedigrees – were in

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[479] Ibid.
[480] Lowe quoted in Shimakawa, *National Abjection,* 100.
[481] Shimakawa, *National Abjection,* 100.
[482] Ibid.
[483] Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 7.
[484] Ibid.

a better position to advocate for their Orientalist interpretation of the Eurasian character. Thus was this Orientalist narrative made to seem "authentic" to audiences for years to come.

Bendix characterizes authenticity as a complicated and troubling attempt "to pinpoint the ineffable"[485] and argues for the removal of authenticity and its "allied vocabulary" as a valuable step in conceptualizing culture in the "age of transculturation."[486] Omi Osun Joni L. Jones comes to the same conclusion in her article "Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity." In Jones' methodological account of her ethnographic performance installation *Searching for Osun* (2001), based on her research in Nigeria on the Yoruba deity, Osun, Jones calls authenticity a "search for psychic fulfillment."[487] However, she ultimately concludes that "by relinquishing the desire for authenticity, one does not give up some vital aspect of blackness and spirituality, but opens up blackness and spirituality to greater variety, ambiguity, and therefore possibility."[488] In other words, letting go of an idealized "authentic" representation of any culture or identity allows for what Bendix calls the "ineffable" to arrive.

I draw parallels between Bendix description of ineffable authenticity and how Chang directs her actors to live within the slippery cracks of cultural identity that have not and maybe cannot be contained within performance. Chang's interest is in interrogating characters that exist between two cultures – East and West –and the embodiment of cultural hybridity. In Chang's *China Doll* the audience witnesses Anna May's turmoil as she repeatedly tries to adapt to Westernized ideologies of Asian femininity, negotiating between her desire to be famous and her wish to maintain some semblance of her personhood. In the audition scene, for example, Anna

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[485] Ibid.
[486] Ibid., 9.
[487] Joni L. Jones, "Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity," *Theatre Topics* 12 (2002): 12.
[488] Ibid.

May begs to read for the role of "O-Lan" in the film adaptation of *The Good Earth.* Although *The Good Earth* was written by a white woman, Pearl S. Buck spent much of her youth and adulthood in China with her missionary parents and later became an activist for gender and racial equality.[489] It is a project that Anna May has championed; it purportedly offers the opportunity for "authentic" Asian performances.

During her audition, Anna May recites her lines with grace and beauty, incorporating slow expansive movements taken from Chinese dance. When the director dismisses her characterization as "inauthentic" Anna May reluctantly plays "Oriental," contracting her body, making herself small, laughing in a high-pitched tone while covering her face. In this moment, Chang juxtaposes both the "real" and the "fake." The "real" embodiment of Chinese culture is still performative; however, the root of the performance is based on traditional Chinese dances. It is perhaps "more real" than the Orientalist embodiment, but through a white (audience) lens it may still lend itself to being categorized and objectified. It is only through seeing Anna May rehearse for the role – with great practice, trying to remember with her body a culture she has spent years erasing – that the audience is shown the cracks and fissures that exist in the intercultural spaces that Chang seeks to present.

At the end of the play, Anna May speaks to a film projection of Gary Cooper – ending with the image of Anna May kissing the film screen. Throughout the play Anna May longed to be the first Asian actress to kiss a white actor on film – breaking a significant barrier of representation that moved Asian women away from fetishized concubines to actual love interests. Anna May's real body juxtaposed with Cooper's projected image give the audience a visceral image of the "real" and imagined. For Anna May, film representation is the only "real"

[489] "Brief Biography of Pearl S. Buck," University of Pennsylvania, Department of English, https://www.english.upenn.edu/Projects/Buck/biography.html

representation. However, in pursuing her single-minded goal of being cemented on film, Anna May becomes a recluse. In essence, she shows the audience that authentic representation is potentially unattainable and will always in some ways be a fetishization. As seen through her directing, Chang relishes moments of cultural specificity and cultural slipperiness, inviting her audience into the authenticity of this messy dichotomy.

Conclusion

I would say that most of the people who work with us, they appreciate the relationships here, they're very appreciative of Pan Asian nurturing them…we really listen to them.[490] – Tisa Chang

As Chang states, it is not always possible to cast actors from specific backgrounds, making it the director's (and any other collaborator's) job to provide the container in which actors can *practice* cultural specificity. In casting, Chang says that an actor need not share the culture of the script; however, she looks for actors who have the capacity to rigorously engage with other cultures, stating, "the important thing about ethnicity is the cultural resonance or cultural specificity. How much does he [the actor] understand the character within a certain world: the movement, the vocal patterns, and the emotional connection, maybe that mystical connection?"[491] Similarly, Yeghiazarian says that "when choosing actors, I look for cultural competence. By this I mean, in Golden Thread's case, the lived experience of otherness, of exclusion. Most immigrant communities in the US share similar experiences. Many were displaced as a result of political upheaval. Many lost resources, family ties, and / or social status when they resettled. These shared experiences provide a common vocabulary and an emotional toolbox from which to draw."[492]

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[490] Chang interview, June 27, 2018.
[491] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors,* 114.
[492] Yeghiazarian, "ReOrienting," 69.

Yeghiazarian asserts that “access points” come in the form of shared vocabularies and common experiences amongst communities. This sentiment is similar to Chang’s idea that Asian cultures share “root” origins that can be mined to assist actors in understanding and presenting intercultural stories. While cementing certain aspects of her productions in cultural specificity, she also allows for a degree of cultural slipperiness in this intercultural exchange. In many ways, Chang’s intercultural theater dismantles essentialist ideas of what authenticity is: it cannot be contained or pinned down. Instead of trying to recreate or impersonate cultural specificity, the actors bring their experiences to a room imbued with culturally-specific dramaturgy, design, and dance. The actors live in the dramaturgy so that by the performance date the cultural experience is deeply connected to their bodies.

Although the type of living dramaturgy Chang creates may help Chang tap into the culturally-specific aspects of the Asian culture she is presenting, adding specific design elements to any given production may not always be enough. I, myself, a white person, would feel entirely unprepared to direct a show about the Asian experience without an Asian artistic collaborator (co-director, dramaturg, etc.) – not to mention a cast of Asian actors. At the same time, in order to stage a culturally-specific work in a white space, I have observed colleagues who collaborate with artistic partners remotely (via Zoom, etc.), integrating culturally-specific design into the show along with thoughtful dialogues about the intercultural theater-making process.

For directors, the stakes of thoughtfully engaging with cultural-specificity could not be higher. The theater community continues to interrogate the ways in which American theater (in particular) has erased, appropriated, and altogether whitewashed the stories of people of color. Simultaneously, the theater community is opening up space for culturally-specific stories to take place, demanding that directors be prepared to direct stories that fall outside of the scope of their

identity. I have met far too many directors (being one myself at times) who quickly gloss over a dramaturgical packet on the first day of rehearsal before doing the "real work" of beginning the staging process.

In Irma Mayorga's 2015 Mid-Atlantic Theatre Conference (MATC) keynote address, she discussed her 2003 O'Neill National Playwrights Conference workshop production of her play *Cascarones*, "a play about history, conquest, and a Mexican-American family living in Texas…".[493] Mayorga chronicled the ways in which the O'Neill team were ill prepared to provide a culturally-competent response to her play. This ranged from the casting director not keeping a database of actors of Mexican descent (saying "there was no need") and instead casting actors with Dominican backgrounds, to the director ignoring/skimming the cultural specificity of the characters, to the dramaturg not engaging in research into the specific history and experiences of Mayorga's Mexican-American characters.[494] As a result, Mayorga says that she wasn't actually able to see her play. "When you are born and raised in Washington Heights with a national and cultural heritage from the Dominican Republic, your ethnic identity, your *manera de ser* ("way of being"), your deportment in total is fundamentally different than say a cowboy boot wearing, western twang wielding, Spanglish speaking Hispano born and raised in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was difficult to watch my earnest, excited, definitely New York Latina/o actors take the stage at the O'Neill. All the way there, and I couldn't see my play...nor could the audience."[495]

Mayorga calls for production teams to consider the culturally-specific demands of the scripts they produce. As facilit*auteurs*, representation for representation's sake is simply not

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[493] Irma Mayorga, "Keynote Address Delivered at the Mid-America Theatre Conference En Ser Inspirado: On Being Inspired" (*Theatre History Studies* 35, 2016): 309.
[494] Ibid., 311.
[495] Ibid.

good enough. While theater culture has moved on from such wildly egregious acts as donning yellowface, there still remains a chasm between representation (seeing BIPOC actors on stage) and cultural competency (engaging with the culture being represented). Using dramaturgical models, facilit*auteurs* may find themselves more capable of thoughtfully approaching cultural specificity and/or cultural otherness. Creating a living dramaturgy can help resist inscribing stereotypical ideals onto characters – as seen in *Miss Saigon* – while allowing for a culture to be as authentically represented as theater is capable of. Through the embodiment of the actors, Chang's ensemble-driven cultural immersion process avoids asking any one actor or artist in the room to take on the (often unpaid) role of being a cultural ambassador. Additionally, Chang's dramaturgical directing techniques resist fixed cultural representations, instead allowing actors to play against and with cultural otherness, which is, perhaps, a more "real" kind of cultural specificity.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC DIRECTOR: LIZ DIAMOND
RADICAL COLLABORATION WITHIN CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC TEXTS

On the first day of rehearsals for Suzan-Lori Parks' 2018 production of *Father Comes Home From the Wars*, the stage manager rises to facilitate a round of introductions. The show is being produced at Yale Repertory Theatre, and the entire theater company, and all the students at the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale University, are welcomed to attend rehearsals. Such "open rehearsals" are a part of the process at Yale. After the stage manager speaks, Yale Rep's Artistic Director, James Bundy, says a few words about the theater's mission to integrate professional theater with student learning and the rep company's long history with the college. For the next hour or so, the dramaturgs, choreographer, voice coach, actors, and Yale Rep staff all introduce themselves. Liz Diamond, Chair of Directing at David Geffen School of Drama and Resident Director at Yale Repertory Theatre, is the last to speak. She stands and says, "Should I say a few words before the first break?"[496] Everyone in the room laughs – a knowing indication that the introductions have indeed gone on a bit long. Announcing that she is always nervous on the first day of rehearsals – it never goes away – Diamond begins by asking, "What does it cost to be free?" This is the central question of Parks' play, which follows Hero, a Texas slave, who is offered freedom by his master (The Colonel) if he follows him into war, fighting for the Confederacy.[497] Diamond describes Parks' script as "sculpting the air with language" and encourages her actors to "ride it like music…enjoy it." She introduces the designers, noting that they are "trying to capture the linguistics of the play in the design."[498]

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[496] *Father Comes Home From the Wars,* rehearsal (Yale Repertory Theatre), February 5, 2018.
[497] Suzan-Lori Parks, *Father Comes Home from the Wars: Parts 1, 2 & 3* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2015).
[498] *Father Comes Home From the Wars,* rehearsal (Yale Repertory Theatre), February 5, 2018.

Diamond acknowledges her position as a white director in the room amongst Black actors, a Black choreographer, a Black voice coach, and a Black playwright. Characterizing her longstanding relationship with the playwright, Suzan-Lori Parks, as one that allows for ideas to be exchanged freely, Diamond says that there will be many conversations about race during the play's rehearsal period.

Generative (and not so generative) conversations surrounding race and the question of who can (and should) direct what plays have long been a staple in the theatrical discipline. In 1993, Ellen Donkin's essay "Black Text, White Director" in *Upstaging Big Daddy* addressed how a white director might approach directing a play written by a Black playwright. As she notes, "As a white director, I may only enter the text of an African-American play in a position of inquiry (distinct from the missionary position)[499]…This clarifying of the director's position…shifts authority for the life of the play onto the playwright and actors living inside of that text."[500] As a white director, Donkin writes, she positions herself, when directing a play by a Black playwright, almost as a facilitator of different questions than the text may imply; she says that she encourages her actors to grapple with the material and imbue it with meaning, rather than make assumptions about a text that she herself may not fully understand.

As a facilit*auteur*, the director's role may include taking a step back to facilitate meaning-making through the help of the *other* artists in the room. This kind of radical decentralization of the director is not so much the director relinquishing their leadership as it is observing and bringing forward the insights of others. This process of observation, asking questions, and articulating the experiences of others closely mirrors ethnographic practices.

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[499] Donkin defines the "missionary position" as white liberal passivism, not taking responsibility for the work.
[500] Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement, *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as If Gender and Race Matter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 82.

In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Clifford Geertz describes the *doing* of ethnography as interpreting the vastness and complexity of culture. Geertz offers the example of a boy who winks at another boy. To the uninformed eye (pun intended) this may look like an ocular twitch. However, understanding what this eye twitch means in a given culture allows the observer to understand that within the context they are witnessing, the wink may signify a knowing glance or flirtation. Geertz goes on to demonstrate that a third boy may then make a sarcastic wink to his friends, thus parodying the first boy in an effort to bully him. The bully's wink has a different meaning than the original wink. Perhaps the wink was rehearsed in the mirror, producing another connotation; perhaps the original wink between the two boys was a ruse to trick those watching into believing there was a conspiracy afoot – yet another connotation…and so on and so forth.[501] In order to understand what each wink means, one must understand the culture in which the wink is taking place. This, in essence, is "doing" ethnography.

As a facilit*auteur,* the doing of ethnography can be aptly applied to the rehearsal room. In understanding what a wink means in terms of a specific cultural context, the facilit*auteur* may take on the position of ethnographer in order to decenter a fixed experiential lens. If I associate winking strongly with flirtation, I may then direct actors to exclusively wink flirtatiously. My limited views on winking will become embedded in the play. Every time a character winks, it will be a sexual act. Whereas, if I decenter myself and am open to other interpretations and understandings of winks – like, perhaps, a mischievous wink – entire character intentions and motivations change.

Approaching the rehearsal room as an ethnographer demands being open to what is not known. As a facilit*auteur*, I do not always know what I don't know but my job is to enter the

[501] Clifford Geertz and Robert Darnton, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 7.

rehearsal space from a position of critical inquiry. In *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, and Performance,* Soyini Madison argues that the "moral bedrock of [ethnographic] fieldwork is always the question."[502] Madison asserts that in understanding cultures, "The fieldwork question acknowledges with both humility and direct(ed) interest that I do not know, and I am a 'knower' in search of something 'known.' The fieldwork question is provocative because it has the potential to unsettle the taken-for-granted, to open up critical awareness, and to remember what was forgotten."[503] Diamond's opening question – *What does it cost to be free?* – has provided the framework for a rehearsal process very much rooted in discovering what is not yet known within the text. By leading with this overarching question, which she returns to throughout the rehearsal process, Diamond opens up the rehearsal space for a dialogue between collaborators that involves multiple perspectives, not necessarily (only) her own. And ultimately, it allows Diamond to decenter her cultural awareness: in essence, she is decentering what a wink means to her for what a wink means in terms of the play.

Directing a text that involves perspectives outside one's lived experience demands living in a space of uncertainty and pursuing understanding. It is not possible for a white director to come into a rehearsal process for a play about the Black experience without understanding that they simply will not know more than the Black artists in the room. In 2017, prompted by South African-American director Liesl Tommy's groundbreaking Tony nomination,[504] *Theatre Bay Area* published an interview with five directors, all women of color, working in and around San

[502] Soyini D. Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012), 82.
[503] Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 82.
[504] When Liesl Tommy received a Tony Award nomination for *Eclipsed* on Broadway, she made theater history as the first woman of color ever nominated for a Tony for Best Director of a Play. *Eclipsed* set another unprecedented moment as the first show in Broadway history to have an all-female, all-black director, cast, and playwright.

Francisco. Director Margo Hall was asked what she thinks about non-Blacks directing Black plays. Hall replied:

> This is what I tell my students about directing something you're not familiar with: your goal is to surround yourself with people who understand that culture. I had a student who loved *A Raisin in the Sun* and she was Irish. Then one of my students who is white said she can't direct this play. I said she can direct it but she needs to make sure she is surrounded by African Americans who she is willing to listen to. A director is a visionary but they don't have all the answers so you have to be open enough to say I don't understand this. That's the problem I feel when white directors take on diverse plays and they feel that when they've done some research they understand it and it's like "no you will never understand it more than me" just like I will never understand something more than someone who's lived an Irish life.[505]

As Hall states, directing cross-culturally demands that directors *listen* to other artists in the room who can access these cultural experiences from an "insider" perspective. Although this may seem like a simple directive, it can push against the idea of the director's role, as Ellen Donkin asserts, "handed down by traditional directing training programs in the academy…" that tends to reinforce authoritarianism and a single creative vision.[506]

As Donkin notes, despite white directors' best intentions, structural racism is, in many ways, baked into traditional directing training practices. In Nicole Brewer's article "Playwrights of Color, White Directors, and Exposing Racist Policy," she writes, "Racist policy, as defined in *Stamped from the Beginning* by Ibram X Kendi, is any policy regardless of original intent that yields a racially unequal outcome."[507] In other words, well-meaning artists can still unconsciously create racist content. Brewer asserts that structural change demands an immediate influx of directors of color. Not only for representation's sake: Brewer argues that theaters that

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[505] Jia Taylor, "Breaking Down Barriers: Black Female Directors In The Bay Area," *Theatre Bay Area,* April 30, 2017.
[506] Donkin and Clement, *Upstaging Big Daddy,* 80.
[507] Nicole Brewer, "Playwrights of Color, White Directors, and Exposing Racist Policy" (*HowlRound,* August 29, 2019).

continue to hire white directors to direct plays by playwrights of color are complicit in perpetuating racist policies that then trickle down throughout the entire artistic process.

These implicit biases also exist in America's "melting pot" culture in which cultural distinctiveness is subverted. When cultural distinctives is erased, it inevitably bolsters the dominant culture, or, in America's case, whiteness. The theatrical equivalent of the "melting pot" often takes the form of practitioners who try to balance the scales of representation by inserting Black and Brown bodies into roles that have been historically written for white bodies, especially with characters whose aim is to reinforce the dominant culture. For example, Brewer recalls being cast in roles that have been historically played by white actors. She says that inserting Black bodies into white roles written by white playwrights in an effort to increase Black representation left her feeling like her own cultural identity was being erased; meanwhile, the production touted its own universality:

> I was always left wondering which parts of my Black identity were expected to be concealed, and I never felt like it was okay for me to talk openly around the imposed cultural erasure. This kind of role was always a struggle and resulted in trauma held as micro-contractions in my body. I lived with the real fear that if I spoke up about issues of racism and the accepted practice of racial neutrality to anyone other than actors of color I would be labeled as unprofessional and would never work again.[508]

Brewer says that actors of color whose identities are so neutralized during the rehearsal process often don't speak up because the theater industry functions on relationships, making it difficult to bring up uncomfortable topics that might upset the director. As she states, "The Latinx actor I spoke with said that, to them, speaking out has been interpreted as them attacking or calling the white director a bad director." Brewer argues that when an artistic director labels a playwright of color's text "universal" in an effort to support their decision for hiring a white

[508] Brewer, "Playwrights of Color."

director, “This type of thinking can create a rehearsal process ripe with unchecked microaggressions from the white director to the actors of color.”[509]

Of course, it is important to mention that cross-cultural casting may have benefits as well. As discussed in the previous chapter, directors like Tisa Chang use cross-cultural casting to disrupt white supremacy. At the same time, Chang is careful to weave this cross-cultural and culturally-specific embodiment into the performance, and not simply layer Black and Brown bodies onto a white text.

The need for the industry to foster, champion, and provide opportunities for directors of color is critical. At the same time, as director Torange Yeghiazarian has stated, there is also harm when artists create a “cultural ghetto where a community of color is only permitted to represent its own.”[510] Without discounting the very real and pressing need for the discipline to take stock of its own whitewashing and structural racism, there is also value in directors learning to thoughtfully and competently direct culturally-specific, intercultural, and cross-cultural stories that do not reflect their own identities. Mining ethnographic methodologies may hold keys for teaching directors how to avoid perpetuating a tradition of cultural and racial bias within the rehearsal room. Decentering oneself – coming into the rehearsal room without any pretext of being the knower – and applying ethnographic tools such as “sympathetic listening” in order to become more informed (that is, more of a knower) can help a facilit*auteur* ethically encounter otherness.

This chapter examines the directorial process of Liz Diamond, a white director who often directs plays by artists of color, in particular by her longtime artistic collaborator, Black

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[509] Ibid.

[510] Torange Yeghiazarian, “ReOrienting: A Middle Eastern American Casting Case Study,” in *Casting a Movement: The Welcome Table Initiative*, eds. Claire Syler and Daniel Banks (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 70.

playwright Suzan-Lori Parks. In surveying Liz Diamond's directing methods, I find many parallels between how she establishes a rehearsal room culture – through critical inquiry and sympathetic listening – and how an ethnographer ethically enters into a space of otherness. Ethnographic research provides instructions on how a director might radically collaborate on a culturally-specific text, especially when the director is an "outsider" to the material. In directing the 2018 Yale Repertory Theatre production of Parks' *Father Comes Home From the Wars: Parts 1, 2, & 3,* Diamond employed radical collaboration through lengthy exploratory dialogical exchanges with the actors. In addition, her radical collaboration with Black choreographer Randy Duncan served as a kind of balance to Diamond's white artistic lens. In my view, Duncan served as an "insider" to Black culture, guiding Diamond through more nuanced Black cultural signifiers.

In the second section of this chapter, I investigate the ways in which actors are responsible for engaging with culturally-specific texts. Within a collaborative rehearsal room, the entirety of the artistic work cannot be placed singularly on the director. The actor, too, must embrace "active thinking" and "sympathetic listening" in order to engage with difference. Often the actor's refusal to engage with otherness comes in the form of what we might call "ego." However, within the context of Diamond's rehearsal room, peeling back actor resistance exposes what I classify as white privilege. Looking specifically at actor resistance within Parks' culturally-specific texts – and how Diamond responded to it – I attempt to identify indicators of white supremacy masquerading as actor resistance.

Although I use the white director, Black playwright dichotomy here, I believe that these techniques can be applied to any director directing outside of their given experiences and/or culture.

Liz Diamond

As big and messy as our country already is, we aren't listening to the rest of the world enough and so I want to train directors from other parts of the world too. I mean, whether they return to their home country or spend time here, I just think it's crucial that a conservatory like Yale, with all of its resources, create opportunity for artists from around the world.[511]
-Liz Diamond

As the Chair of the David Geffen School of Drama's Directing Department and a Board Member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, Liz Diamond is in a position to effect real change in how directors approach culturally-specific work. Diamond has mentored dozens of successful working directors and helped develop Yale's collaborative methodologies course for directing students. Diamond has served as Resident Director of Yale Repertory Theatre since 1992 and as Chair of the Directing Department since 2004.[512] Diamond may be best known for her longtime artistic relationship with MacArthur Foundation's "genius" grant-winning playwright, Suzan-Lori Parks. Diamond and Parks' collaborations have spanned over thirty years, long before Diamond had the full resources of Yale at her disposal. Diamond and Parks were first introduced by producer Greta Gunderson[513] and quickly collaborated on Parks' *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* in 1989. Diamond staged the play's scenes one and four at BACA Downtown in Brooklyn and later pooled together $4,000 with Parks to produce the entire play, which won Diamond an Obie Award for Direction in 1990 and Parks an Obie Award for Best New American Play.[514]

In 1989 and 1990, Diamond worked with the Women's Project on a survey of the history of women on Broadway, off-Broadway, and off-off Broadway. She found that the number of

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[511] Liz Diamond, interview by author, April 5, 2018.
All subsequent "Diamond interview" citations refer to this interview.
[512] Liz Diamond, *Pillow Talking's Interview*, July 28, 2017.
[513] Gunderson was Director of BACA Downtown, a nonprofit visual and performing arts center in Brooklyn. Gunderson died in 2017.
[514] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors*, 143.

women directors working on Broadway from 1902 to 1989 remained at a staggering low percentage: "It remained fixed at 2%. It never got worse. It never got better."[515] Although Diamond hopes women directors one day achieve parity on Broadway,[516] she is more interested in how women will change theater as a form. On a 1997 panel sponsored by the Women's Project entitled "Women Shaping the Theatre for the Future," Diamond questioned "whether the next generation of women directors would still be working on breaking the glass ceiling of commercial theater or, instead, transforming the world."[517] Diamond's commitment to changing America's theater culture is evident in the projects she chooses and the theaters she works with:

> I will say truly, honestly, I've never been terribly interested in a commercial career. I've always been interested in doing work that I think is going to shock the conscience of the audience, that's going to disrupt, destabilize, excite, arouse people to think differently, feel differently, know themselves better. Frankly, I think a lot of that work has been written by women and by artists of color because that's where the societal fault lines are and in that sense I have felt privileged. I have felt that my gender has been a privilege because I have felt that I've been approached by those artists with greater confidence and greater trust in my ability to penetrate their work, than perhaps certain say white male colleagues might have been.[518]

Diamond's commitment to exposing, examining, and excavating the "societal fault lines" is rooted in a deep commitment to broadening the borders of the American theater landscape: "I feel a strong obligation on two fronts in particular: artists of color and women. I feel the world has to change for those artists and I want to be part of that change. I think that the American theater is too provincial by half and that the flow of ideas has to stop being as provincial as it has been in our country." [519]

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[515] Diamond interview.
[516] According to "Broadway by the Numbers," in 2019 13% of Broadway shows were directed by women: https://production.pro/broadway-by-the-numbers.
[517] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors*, 149.
[518] Diamond interview.
[519] Ibid.

Diamond's life experiences have been far from provincial. After graduating from Wellesley in 1976 with a B.A. she joined the Peace Corps and served in Burkina Faso for three years.[520] Diamond intended to go to graduate school for international relations after her time in the Peace Corps; however, during her stay in Burkina Faso she helped create a theater company with local, politically-passionate students. The theater toured the country putting on plays "that used traditional performance forms to tell contemporary stories that dealt with rural life and the collision of modernity…"[521] Once Diamond returned to the States, she felt compelled to learn how to "direct in her own country" and sought to contribute to the cultural conversations happening in America. She enrolled in Columbia University's M.F.A. directing program and immersed herself in experimental theater. During her time at Columbia, she worked at the New York State Council on the Arts, an experience she describes as clueing her into the interconnectedness of state funding and theater.

In 1984, after graduating from Columbia, Diamond worked in the costume shop at Ellen Stewart's La Mama ETC – despite not knowing how to sew.[522] Like many working directors, Diamond began her career by hitting the pavement:

> I just began showing up everywhere. I began by directing play readings. I went where I thought the door would open easily and it did at the Women's Project and it did at La Mama and it did at New Dramatists, where I became a Resident Director. Ellen Stewart, god rest her soul, gave me my first show. Julia Miles [Women's Project] gave me my second show. Mark Russell gave me my third show [P.S.122]. All of these people were feminists…That's that weird thing where after working in the wilderness, so to speak, for six or seven years, all of a sudden you become an overnight sensation.[523]

Over the course of Diamond's six-week rehearsal process for Suzan-Lori Parks' *Father Comes Homes From the Wars: Parts 1, 2, & 3*, I observed a director who trusts her artistic

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[520] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors*, 142.
[521] Liz Diamond, *Pillow Talking's Interview*, July 28, 2017.
[522] Diamond interview.
[523] Ibid.

collaborators, encourages artistic ownership, and engages in thoughtful dialogues with her actors. Diamond's commitment to dismantling American theatrical provincialism and creating a rehearsal room that encourages participation has impacted and continues to contribute to a shifting process of directing that responds to what she calls "societal fault lines" and counts radical collaboration as its key component.

The Doing of Ethnography: "Active Thinking" and "Sympathetic Listening"

> *It wasn't as though I didn't have those moments where I felt, "oh stop now. It's too much too soon" or "one voice too many" or "I've got this," but those were so few and far between compared to the moments where [my collaborators] would pipe up with an observation unbidden, unasked for, that would be perfectly timed, on the money, or even if not perfectly timed, what the hell. We're not fragile dolls.*[524] – Liz Diamond

Ethnography, as a method of anthropological study, has a difficult history, as most European practices do. The process of observing and cataloguing the behaviors, rituals, and customs of other cultures has historically been one of the first steps towards colonialism. In "Dunham Possessed: Ethnographic Bodies, Movement, and Transnational Constructions of Blackness," Stephanie Batiste writes, "Called the 'handmaiden of imperialism,' the science of anthropology defined those racially and culturally different from the white West as inferior, thus providing a justification for imperial economic, military, and political power around the world."[525] Many ethnographic scholars, including Soyini Madison, Linda Alcoff, Della Pollock, Judith Hamera, Shaka McGlotten, and Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez, address these issues in their work. Because of this violent and oppressive history, contemporary performance ethnographers take great care to interrogate and address these histories, developing methods and practices that resist traumatic and unethical encounters with otherness.

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[524] Ibid.

[525] Stephanie L. Batiste, "Dunham Possessed: Ethnographic Bodies, Movement, and Transnational Constructions of Blackness," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 13, no. 2 (2007): 9

In Omi Osun Joni L. Jones' essay, "Performance and Ethnography, Performing Ethnography, Performance Ethnography," she writes, "Performance ethnography embraces the muddiness of multiple perspectives, idiosyncrasy, and competing truths, and pushes everyone present into an immediate confrontation with our beliefs and behavior. Body-to-body, we are less able to retreat into the privacy of our own limited self-serving thinking, our stereotypes and biases. We have to acknowledge the validity of another viewpoint, because it is living right there in front of us."[526]

Although Jones is talking specifically about performance, she speaks to a particular kind of confrontation with otherness that audiences experience watching an ethnographic performance unfold. In witnessing multiple perspectives, varying cultural resonances, and differing identities, Jones argues, spectators' biases are necessarily challenged. It is extremely difficult to share a space with the "other," witnessing profound vulnerabilities, and not acknowledge, as Jones notes, the "validity of another's viewpoint." Jones' theory of encountering otherness is aptly applied in rehearsal rooms where a range of identities (via actors, designers, and other artistic collaborators) come together to create a performance. Diamond's methodologies, despite being set in a more traditional rehearsal room, parallel Jones' descriptions of ethnographic performance. Through the lens of ethnographic methodologies, Diamond positions herself to challenge her own bias while avoiding, as Jones asserts, a "self-serving" view.

It should be noted that in my layering of ethnographic methods on top of the directing processes I observed Diamond exhibiting, I admit that there is a slipperiness between what one

[526] Olorisa Omi Osunolomo (Joni L. Jones), "Performance and Ethnography, Performing Ethnography, Performance Ethnography," in *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies,* eds. Judith Hamera and D. Soyini Madison (SAGE Publications, 2005): 344.

might call a dramaturgical approach and ethnography. In *Performed Ethnography and Communication,* Madison notes that ethnographic research comes in many forms:

> In bringing your ethnographic research and experiences to the stage, you may choose from a range of materials in various forms and combinations: interview transcripts, field notes, email correspondences, personal memories, diaries, blogs, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, court proceedings, historic documents, music, sound, digital imagery, visual archives, dance, symbolic movement, poetic texts, literary fiction and non-fiction, as well as the improvisations and devised scenes developed in rehearsals and workshops.[527]

While many of these ethnographic research sites – newspaper articles, historic documents, music, sound, digital imagery, visual archives, dance, symbolic movement, poetic texts, and literary fiction and non-fiction – can be found in Diamond's dramaturgy and design, to avoid covering the same terrain as in my previous chapter, I am explicitly avoiding discussing the specific ways in which Diamond employs dramaturgy. My interest in this chapter is to examine how her work with actors mirrors ethnographic research that can be further extrapolated for directing best practices. However, I must note that the research her dramaturgical team assembled was instrumental in informing and opening space for conversations surrounding the play's central question: *What does it cost to be free?*

In many ways a facilit*auteur* not only considers artistic collaborators' contributions but often privileges them. In my interview with Diamond, she talked extensively about the actor's craft. Like the ethnographer, Diamond genuinely regards the actors as "knowers" and views her role as listening to what they need in order to "summon" their character.

> I think that the actor's art is extraordinary. They are in a way the complete artist. They use their bodies, their imaginations, their minds, their life experience, their own emotional makeup. Their needs, their anxieties, their hungers, their dreads. Their anger, their love, every single day in their work and I think one of the things I've come to understand about my task as a director is how to create the room, a kind of safe space for them to find out

[527] Soyini D. Madison, *Performed Ethnography and Communication: Improvisation and Embodied Experience* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2018): xix.

> what parts of themselves they need to summon to dock with this character, to enter, to inhabit the skin of this character, of this role.[528]

In my observations, Diamond's conversational exchanges with actors were central to her directing process. Diamond's process is deeply psychological, verging on meditative. In *American Women Stage Directors,* journalist Joan Anderman of the *Boston Globe* described sitting in on a rehearsal in which Diamond "listened attentively to long ardent speeches from actors struggling to grasp the psychology of their characters…Diamond never seems to impose her will, but rather allows a remarkably fluid, collaborative interplay to unfold."[529] During a particularly stirring scene in Act 3, after Hero returns from the war and has taken the name Ulysses, he tells his wife, Penny, that he has married another woman in order to have children. Penny is dumbstruck:

> The face I got isn't good enough, I guess. So I'll work on it. Change it. Make it into something better. How about a smile? All the days I waited for you. Smile. The months I waited for you. Smile. All the time. And every time we heard of someone dead I prayed it wasn't you. Smile. I worked hard while you was gone. I minded the Missus like you told me to. Like you told me to. Smile. Smile. Smile. I hate you. [530]

Diamond works intimately with the actors to achieve the emotional intensity required to deliver Parks' powerful lines. Diamond is constantly moving. She gets up from her chair and speaks in hushed tones to the actor playing Penny. For almost thirty minutes they quietly go through the speech line by line discussing the intention behind each word. When Diamond does not understand the actor playing Penny's motivation, she asks questions instead of asserting her own opinion of the situation. Diamond says to the actor playing Penny, "There is something so injured here…why do you keep going?" The actor playing Penny tries to explicate her

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[528] Diamond interview.
[529] Joan Anderman quoted in Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors,* 148.
[530] Suzan-Lori Parks, *Father Comes Home from the Wars: Parts 1, 2 & 3* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2015), 150.

motivations but she is unable to fully express what she believes her character is feeling. Through Diamond's intense listening – not assuming, not leading the actor in any one direction – she is able to ask neutral questions that help the actor clarify their motivation.

The two talk for a while, and then Diamond succinctly interprets what she hears Penny saying: "If you don't, you may never get up." When Penny starts the monologue again, she is able to more fully realize the speech and begins to cry. During the monologue, in a delicate balancing act, Diamond intermittently interjects comments intended to push Penny to excavate the significance of each word. She assists Penny in finding the emotional stakes of the piece, to understand them in terms of her own life, and to internalize them. Then, she watches as Penny interprets, molds, and enhances these notes into an embodied action. The actor playing Penny stops occasionally, asking to play the scene again with some new discovery. In many ways, Diamond's exchange parallels an ethnographic interview. She engages with the actor from a place of neutrality, or from the position of not knowing. She asks neutral questions and acutely listens to the actor's response. This sort of open communicative exchange – in my experience, rare in director/actor dynamics – allows the actor to lead the conversation, rather than the director hammering (or even delicately leading) the actor towards a preset conclusion as conceived by the director.

In "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics," Dwight Conquergood cites ethnographer and historian Johannes Fabian when he asserts that "the way to prevent temporal reifications of other cultures is for ethnographers to rethink themselves as communicators, not scientists."[531] Soyini Madison expounds on the importance of "active thinking" and "sympathetic listening" in the ethnographer's interview process: "The

[531] Dwight Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics," in *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies,* eds. Judith Hamera and D. Soyini Madison (SAGE Publications, 2005): 355.

conversational quality that evolves from the interview is substantively meaningful and a key factor of rapport that is generated by active thinking and sympathetic listening. You are listening with an open heart and kind reception to what is being said and expressed to you; you are not motivated by judgment, but by understanding. As you fully engage the art of listening sympathetically, you are actively thinking about what is being expressed; you are not just present in body, but deeply engaged in mind."[532]

Although Diamond's process may seem simple – she listens! – this kind of radical decentralization of the director's own authority is an involved methodological process. It demands that the director quiet the voice inside her head that says, "we don't have enough time, this looks good enough" or "this isn't what I envisioned," and instead engage in the subtle nuances involved in culturally competent character work. It demands an active engagement in listening and responding to what the actor is saying (both verbally and physically).

In order to position oneself to actively listen to collaborators, a director must acknowledge their own position of power in the room, which Madison calls "reflexive ethnography." Reflexive ethnography demands that ethnographers interrogate structures of power through their own power, privileges, and biases: "When we turn back [on ourselves], we are accountable for our own research paradigms, our own positions of authority, and our own moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation."[533] Conquergood describes this as a communicative praxis that demands a "copresence even as it decenters the categories of knower and known"[534] and argues that it shifts the dynamics from one of "authority to vulnerability."[535] For Diamond, this means opening up the space for conversations where she is

[532] Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 32.
[533] Ibid., 8.
[534] Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 355.
[535] Ibid.

not the "knower." As with her exchange with the actor playing Penny, Diamond may ask questions as part of her active thinking in response to what she is hearing (sympathetic listening), but she resists privileging her own answers to these questions.

This kind of active engagement also demands that Diamond not be too attached to her own ideas when one of her or her collaborators' notes is critiqued or discarded. "Turning back" on oneself requires, as Diamond has echoed, an ability to be vulnerable enough to offer ideas and collaboratively gracious enough to receive feedback on these ideas and/or to acknowledge when they are not working:

> I think a rehearsal can be rough, a little rough and ready, and I think that it's important for everyone to allow for a certain kind of scrum, of idea, of debate, because it gets everybody feeling a little less precious. If I can go, "Oh, she's right," in front of everybody or go, "Oh, oh, oh, let's try that," or if I can stand in front of a company and say, "I don't see it that way," it just makes everybody less precious and I feel that directors have to be less precious. I also think you want to build a room where everybody doesn't have to do things perfectly and in the perfect moment all the time.[536]

In this way, not only does Diamond allow space for others' opinions to have privilege over her own, but she models the behavior of someone eager to hear multiple perspectives. This modeling behavior from the central authority figure in the room gives permission to others to be less sensitive about their opinions, especially when it comes to actively listening to collaborators who have experience with the play's themes.

Diamond has developed aspects akin to reflexive ethnography in her method for determining how to respond to behavior she cannot decipher. When I asked Diamond what she has learned over the course of her career, her answer reflected the ways in which she has sought to recognize the actor's process as separate from her own:

> The kind of anxiety that a young director often feels when an actor is moody or has a furrowed brow while you're offering them direction, or who sort of is strangely sphinx-like, doesn't seem to offer you the kinds of responsiveness that make you feel

[536] Diamond interview.

> comfortable, like nodding their head vigorously, or saying, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah,' or eagerly jumping into your idea. None of that should be assumed to be about you. I think there's a letting go that has to happen so that you don't destroy yourself and your colleagues trying to control what you cannot control.[537]

As Diamond explains, she has learned to decenter her own response codes, allowing for different notions of embodiment and readings of interpersonal interactions. Just because Actor A responds with eager nods does not mean that Actor B will respond in the same manner even though they may be digesting the material in a similar way. Diamond acknowledges that what she thinks an actor might be thinking or feeling is not always correct. Instead, if it is important to the scene, she simply asks the actor what they are thinking or feeling.

As Conquergood and Soyini demonstrate, listening to others demands giving up one's authority over certain kinds of knowledge. As Conquergood states, ethnographers must be communicators, not scientists. He rethinks ethnography as primarily about "speaking and listening, instead of observing…"[538] In terms of directing, this is the shift from auteur to facilitator; from having all the answers to having none; from strictly directing actors through observation to conversing with them. Soyini outlines the kinds of rapport needed to engage in "active thinking" and "sympathetic listening" – an open heart, understanding, and an engaged mind.[539] Listening, then, cannot just be a superficial act in which the director has cursory conversations with actors. Active thinking and sympathetic listening stipulate that facilit*auteurs* invest fully in these exchanges and view them as essential to the artistic process.

Ethnography through Embodiment

> *Well, first of all, this is my third show with Randy [Duncan]. I trust him implicitly. I believe in his great eye. Above all, I believe in his extraordinary spiritual energy. I feel that he just brings into a room, a kind of calm concentration and love for the work.*[540] -Liz Diamond

[537] Ibid.
[538] Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 355.
[539] Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 32.
[540] Diamond interview.

In "Keeping it Real Without Selling Out," Venus Opal Reese says that Suzan-Lori Parks and other major playwrights of African ancestry "write embodiment into their texts through sentence structure, punctuation, stage direction, grammar, and syntax"[541] as a way to remember and reimagine a history of Black trauma. Through her writing, Reese says, Parks resists "Western norms"[542] that lend themselves to actors acting "on top of" racialized histories that lead to "plastic, splintered, and forced"[543] performances. Reese asserts that "embodiment is the intersection of personal history with collective memory"[544] and argues that it is necessary to deconstruct history in order to avoid playing a stereotype. As she states, "In order to take something apart, one must have a comprehensive understanding and wherewithal (or patience) to take it apart and execute it. Once something is taken apart it loses its charge – it can be reconfigured to the specifications of the deconstructionist."[545] Parks and other Black playwrights write embodiment into their sentence structure in an effort to resist the ways in which a system of Anglo theatrical realism often oppresses Black bodies. Reese states:

> If one is of African ancestry (which I am), and has been trained at universities (which I have), one is keenly aware of how the historical racial concepts, views, values, paradigms, and paradoxes that make up what it means to be American, permeate actor training. What is more, acting technique[s] are then paired with dramatic texts that have the tendency to further leave the actor of African ancestry with yet another space in which "blackness" becomes servitude, violence, or God-like sainthood – racialized. Because of the history of Trans-Atlantic Slavery, "Blackness" is automatically positioned as wrong, less, subservient.[546]

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[541] Venus Opal Reese, "Keeping it Real without Selling Out: Toward Confronting and Triumphing Over Racially-Specific Barriers in American Acting Training," in *The Politics of American Actor Training,* eds. Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud (New York: Routledge, 2010), 163.
[542] Ibid., 164.
[543] Ibid.
[544] Ibid., 165.
[545] Ibid.
[546] Ibid., 164.

In order for directors to create the container in which actors flourish, they must interrogate every aspect of the cultural resonances of the text. This requires not only listening to actors and other artistic collaborators regarding cultural, societal, and political gradations that the director may not "get," but it also demands that the director question the ways in which the embodiment may contribute to or resist reifying these oppressive systems. Parks' script resists codifying Blackness in violence and servitude; however, if a director does not (care to) understand Parks' deconstructionist lens, they may erase these resonances in the staging. Furthermore, not all playwrights bake embodiment into their scripts. Directors, too, must be able to interrogate all the ways that their choices (and the choices of their actors) either contribute to or disrupt white supremacy.

Part of Diamond's methodology for embodying Parks' deconstructionist history is through her collaboration with choreographer Randy Duncan: this is their fourth project together. Duncan's role in the room is to work with actors on their physicality. Much like Tisa Chang, Diamond builds character through physical embodiment, and the hour-long warm-ups with Randy Duncan constitute a significant part of that process. Diamond has admitted she has a bias "toward actors who have developed a highly physical imagination"[547] and says that the shared physical task of warming up together strengthens the ensemble in a way that allows for more emotional risks to be taken later in rehearsals:

> I actually believe that what Randy does in the hour-long warm-up should be a part of every production. I think that the discipline of moving in space, of sweating together, of breathing together, of following commands that are increasingly complex, that actually challenge you to push through certain physical barriers and emotional barriers, like, "I'm embarrassed to try that, I'm a klutz or whatever. I don't know if I can actually push my hip that far," [is an essential element of the rehearsal process]. In a sense, it is the discipline of an athlete. I think an actor is an athlete. An athlete of the imagination and I think that by establishing that rigor and that self-awareness, kinesthetic self-awareness

[547] Fliotsos and Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors,* 146.

> and that comradery, that esprit de corps that comes from doing something together well. I just think it's the glue.[548]

Over the course of the six-week rehearsal process, I observed that Duncan often integrates African music and dance into his warm-up process. Everyone in the ensemble is asked to mimic Duncan as he demonstrates specific movements from different regions of Africa. I noticed on one occasion the two white actors grouping themselves together and exchanging glances that seemed to indicate a level of discomfort. However, over the course of the rehearsal process these warm-ups became seemingly effortless, almost ritualistic. And, by the fourth week, Diamond and other members of the production staff had joined the warm-up as well.

In "Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity," Omi Osun Joni L. Jones describes her ethnographic performance installation *Searching for Osun*, which is based on her research in Nigeria on the Yoruba deity, Osun. *Searching for Osun*, Jones says, presents the spectator with opportunities to interact with Yoruba culture, including through newspaper clippings, video recordings, traditional games, and dances. For Jones, performance ethnography can be defined as "how culture is done in the body." As she states, "This method [performance ethnography] builds on two primary ideas: 1) that identity and daily interactions are a series of conscious and unconscious choices improvised within culturally and socially specific guidelines, and 2) that people learn through participation. If people are genuinely interested in understanding culture, they must put aspects of that culture on and into their bodies."[549]

Jones asserts that participation is one feature that distinguishes traditional performance from ethnographic performance: "Through participation, the audience can contrast their own

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[548] Diamond interview.

[549] Joni L. Jones, "Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity," *Theatre Topics* (2002): 7.

culturally inscribed bodies with those from the community being shared. They get an opportunity to 'practice' the physical elements of culture through the performance."[550] Similarly, Madison describes practicing culture as having the ability to reach across time and space, spreading from one society to another.[551] In the case of Duncan's African-diasporic inspired warm-ups, the actors, in some ways, do the work of "turning back" on history. They are able to root their understanding of African culture in their bodies. As E. Patrick Johnson writes in "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from my Grandmother," "…vernacular traditions that emerged among enslaved Africans—including folktales, spirituals, and the blues—provided the foundation for social and political empowerment."[552] Duncan's focus on African rituals channels some of the modes of empowerment that brought enslaved people together. In this way, Duncan creates a conversation with the abolitionist history of resistance to oppression. The Black actors, in my estimation, are then more able to embody the joys of African ancestry even as they enact servitude. Although the white actors may have a different experience with these exercises, they too are invited into a more fully realized view of African culture that they might not have gleaned from the script. As Jones notes, "Participation [in the culture] is where some of the deepest understandings occur."[553]

Diamond and Duncan's collaborative relationship was exceedingly generative in its back-and-forth real-time reconciliation of cultural embodiment. Throughout rehearsals, Diamond relied on Duncan to create strong tableaus that emphasize the deconstructionist language of Parks' script. In the first moments of the play, a chorus of enslaved people named Leader,

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[550] Ibid.
[551] Madison, *Performed Ethnography and Communication,* 6.
[552] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother*,"* in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson, Mae G. Henderson, and Sharon P. Holland (Duke University Press, 2005), 139.
[553] Jones, "Performance Ethnography," 7.

Second, Third, and Fourth are looking at the sun and deciding what time to run away. Duncan places the characters in a staggered vertical line, going from tallest to shortest, each character with one hand raised for the duration of the exchange. When the conversation is over each character lowers their hand in unison. The position and uniformity of the physical gesture resembles an infinity mirror, in which a pair of parallel mirrors creates a smaller and smaller reflection that recedes forever.

The spectator unconsciously fills in the rest of the image: reflections of captured Africans that continue indefinitely. The only difference in the tableau is the faces of the actors, each communicating a different set of emotions, in this case determination, resignation, fear, and anger. As Diamond worked through the play, Duncan continuously moved the characters around, taking the realistic gestures of the actors and heightening them to the precipice of appearing unnatural (much like the way Parks writes). This particular tableau was thus a collaboration between Diamond, Duncan, and the actors.

As a white director collaborating with a Black choreographer, Diamond resists reinforcing the racialized paradigms Reese has outlined. In many ways their collaboration invokes the ethnographer's use of "multivocality" described by Jones as helping to "mitigate the authority of the ethnographer…"[554] Multivocality can be understood as accepting a high rate of relativism. As an artist, Diamond may have a strong sense of direction, but multivocality demands that she temper her views in order to allow for the possibility that hers are not necessarily the "right" ones – or at least the right ones for *this* show – as artistry is relative.

Duncan easily intervenes when Diamond's staging of intentionally-resistant moments in the script veer too far into realism. Diamond has set up her rehearsal room such that Duncan does

[554] Ibid., 9.

not need to ask permission to intercede. Indeed, their collaboration is often effortless. While Diamond works with other actors on their entrance, Duncan shifts this opening tableau into an almost abstract movement, signifying the "real" while also indicating the weight of the moment. Yet, Duncan does not allow the characters to embody a "slave" narrative that fears white supremacy. Instead, the tableau serves as symbolic gesture of resistance. In other words, what Diamond does not see, Duncan does. With this system of working, Diamond decenters any one voice or perspective in the room as the "authority" on culture. By bringing together a multitude of perspectives, the responsibility of doing the "representing" is shared.

Disruptive White Privilege

> *I think [what] we have to do as directors is to help the actor trust themselves by communicating our love and trust for their work. And that can be hard sometimes when you don't see a result as a director. When you don't see your words landing, your prompts, your offers being taken up.*[555]
>
> – Liz Diamond

Diamond says that she has "gotten better at reading actors, at being able to empathize with their struggle" and, perhaps most importantly, is no longer "threatened by their struggle."[556] As most directors can attest, working with actors through their struggles can be taxing and time-consuming, though ultimately rewarding. The real work of theater is grappling with big ideas regarding the human experience and finding a way to represent those ideas through embodiment. As Diamond asserts, actors are the "complete" artists and – as I have explored in this dissertation – are often put in vulnerable positions.

Being open to new ways of being in the world is a weighty task. When I asked Tisa Chang what she sees as the most important aspect of her process in creating intercultural performances, she replied with certainty: "Well, first is personality and the values that the person

[555] Diamond interview.
[556] Ibid.

holds. I mean, that's so important. Meaning, is that person coming into this room throwing out the window any kind of ego, or self-centeredness, or self-serving-ness? So that we all are there to do the work of this extraordinary script, or play, or song. And I think that's the very strong beginning, to leave ego outside, and to have that selflessness..."[557]

Diamond asserts that sometimes the best way to handle an actor's resistance is to allow them the room to work through their own artistic process. During *Father Comes Home From the Wars,* the actor playing Odyssey "Odd-see" Dog (Hero's beloved and faithful companion) seemingly did not know how to approach his character, who is, in fact, a dog. Besides needing to embody a talking animal, Odyssey Dog only appears during Part Three of the script, when he gives an epic monologue detailing with humor and profound insight events that transpired at Hero's home while he was gone. The actor eventually found his character and, according to some (me, for example), stole the show with his committed and intentional characterization of Parks' omniscient narrator. By Diamond's holding back and letting the actor work through his process, Odyssey Dog emerged. Commenting on the experience, Diamond said:

> I thought that [actor's name omitted] signaling to me as director, his need, his personal artistic, professional need for the space and time to find himself in the role was well done. I got it. I don't know whether a younger or less experienced director would have been intimidated by that, would have been frustrated by that, but I thought, "No, he's letting me know how he wants to work with me. I'm gonna get in there but I'm gonna wait.." …I think there's a letting go that has to happen so that you don't destroy yourself and your colleagues trying to control what you cannot control."[558]

As Diamond elucidates, she has learned to let go of what she shouldn't try and control. However, at what point does the actor's struggle signal something more? When does an actor's resistance become an ethical dilemma? And what does a director do when a road block is actually white privilege in disguise?

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[557] Tisa Chang, interview by author, Feb 1, 2020.
[558] Diamond interview.

In *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*, Norman K. Denzin argues that "Every time a text is performed, a performance ethics is enacted. Performers, as Stucky (1993, p. 176) argues, need to take responsibility for their interpretations of another's life experiences."[559] In taking responsibility for representing others' life experiences, Dwight Conquergood asserts that "good will and an open heart"[560] are not enough when one seeks to represent the other or, as I interpret it, to engage in culturally-specific material. He names four "ethical pitfalls" that can occur when someone "seeks to express cultural experiences which are clearly separate from his or her lived world."[561] Within these four pitfalls or "dangerous shores,"[562] Conquergood says, is a dynamic center he calls the "dialogical performance." Borrowing methodologies from performance ethnographers might help a facilit*auteur* ethically guide a struggling actor through these "dangerous shores."

The first ethical offense is what Conquergood calls "The Custodian's Rip-Off." Soyini Madison describes this as when "fieldworkers enter the field for the single purpose of 'getting good material' to further their own self-interest and ambition"[563] "without respectful regard for subjects."[564] The second offense is "The Enthusiast's Infatuation," in which "performance runs around in the shallows"[565] introducing a "quick fix" to the problems of difference while trivializing the other through generalizations, concluding with "aren't we all really alike?"[566] The third offense is "The Curator's Exhibitionism." Whereas the "The Enthusiast's Infatuation" is

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[559] Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997), 18.
[560] Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 4.
[561] Wallace Bacon quoted in Conquergood, 4.
[562] Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 5.
[563] Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 11.
[564] Ibid., 12.
[565] Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 6.
[566] Ibid.

with sameness, "The Curator's Exhibitionism" is with difference. In this offense, the curator is "fascinated by exotic difference and distance"[567] and wants to "astonish rather than understand."[568] Finally, the offense that I will be more closely examining is "The Skeptic's Cop-Out." Conquergood contends that this offense is marked by a line in the sand – a "No Trespassing"[569] sign – that rejects intercultural or cross-cultural exchange. The "Skeptic's Cop-Out" describes a white person (for example) who refuses to engage with Blackness or Black culture because they are not Black. Conquergood delineates this pitfall as the "most morally reprehensible corner of the map because it forecloses dialogue."[570] When an actor shuts down because of their own discomfort with otherness, it then becomes the facilit*auteur's* responsibility to assist the actor in opening up space for difficult dialogical exchanges.

During my time observing *Father Comes Home From the Wars,* I noticed what I speculate were instances of The Skeptic's Cop-Out: specifically, white men disengaging from otherness in Parks' script. There are, of course, many reasons an actor may demonstrate a resistance or discomfort with the play's text. However, as a facilit*auteur* it is important to recognize when privilege or bias is creeping into the rehearsal room. As I contend, outside of producing an ineffective performance, privilege or bias can reproduce an environment of white hegemony, foreclosing dialogue and siphoning resources away from, in Diamond's case, the Black actors.

As mentioned earlier, Parks' poetic script takes a difficult look at America's racist history. "Part Two: A Battle in the Wilderness" takes place in a makeshift camp where Hero and The Colonel, presumably lost, are waiting to meet up with the rest of the Confederate Army. The

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[567] Madison, *Critical Ethnography,* 12.
[568] Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 7.
[569] Ibid., 8.
[570] Ibid.

Colonel has captured a Union officer, Smith, and expects to be greatly rewarded for his hostage. The Union soldier, however, is actually a private in the First Kansas Colored Infantry posing as his deceased (white) captain. When Hero and Smith are left alone, Hero discovers the deception and also slowly realizes that Smith is actually a "colored man" who can pass for white.

"A Battle in the Wilderness" revolves around the theme of captivity and Blackness. Hero believes that The Colonel will make good on his promise and grant him his freedom once the war is over. Hero refuses to abandon The Colonel despite numerous opportunities. Hero believes that his best chance for freedom is to be a dutiful and obedient servant: he believes that he will be the *exception*. Smith, on the other hand, was granted his freedom after his owner died. He is well-spoken, apparently educated, and extremely self-righteous. He calls The Colonel a "drunken dumb Jeb"[571] and refuses to abase himself to ask for water, food, or a reprieve from his cage. At one point in the scene, The Colonel leaves and Smith encourages Hero to take his Union jacket and go north, freeing himself. But Hero, though tempted, has accepted that his value, and therefore safety, is attached to being a piece of property.

Questions surrounding Blackness and the objectification of Black bodies were at the heart of two significant acting issues that emerged during Diamond's rehearsals. First, the actor playing The Colonel was extremely resistant to embodying a violent white supremacist; and second, the actor playing Smith was a white man who had no access to Blackness.

Smith and The Colonel only appear in Part Two; this is the only time when white bodies are visible onstage, although arguably, The Colonel's presence – or the threat of his presence, or how the chorus of captives must navigate being in his presence – is the unseen figure in every scene in the play. Although The Colonel is clearly the villain in the story, Parks writes him with

[571] *Father Comes Home,* 58.

a depth that proved difficult for the actor playing The Colonel to reconcile. In a private conversation, Diamond noted that The Colonel, in the scene with Smith, had to be both domineering and somewhat subservient. He had to battle with his own lack of self-worth while masquerading as the one in power. In discussing The Colonel's performance, Diamond asked, "…how does a man born with a wooden spoon in his mouth, how does he lord his authority over a Yankee prisoner, who he thinks is an aristocrat?"[572] Although Diamond noted that the actor playing The Colonel worked exceptionally hard, it was clear to me during rehearsals that the actor wanted to emphasize more of The Colonel's "good-natured" traits such as playing the banjo, which he learned specifically for the role. In a way, The Colonel's humanity makes him more difficult to play. He is not solely villain and not solely good-humored Southern boy; he is both. At the same time, that is kind of the point. White supremacy often goes unchecked because the packaging it comes in can sometimes be in a body of a person we like.

Throughout rehearsals, the actor playing The Colonel struggled to find the anger needed to embody a sadistic character. Instead, the actor embellished The Colonel's humor and weakness. However, it is this precise feeling of powerlessness that precipitates The Colonel's need to subject Hero to a spectacle of his domination. As argued in Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, the hypervisibility of the enslaved person's body made it subject to objectification and subjugation. Black bodies were the principal object onto which white slave owners demonstrated their power: "…the exercise of power was inseparable from its display because domination depended upon demonstrations of the slaveholder's dominion and the captive's abasement."[573] In exhibiting the

[572] Diamond interview.
[573] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7.

abuses that enslaved Africans suffered at the hands of white slaveowners, The Colonel *must* contend with the horrific acts of his character. By refusing to fully engage with this type of racialized violence, the actor erased a crucial part of Black history Parks intentionally wrote into her script.

At one particularly tense point in the scene when it is becoming clear to The Colonel that he might be losing his power over Hero, The Colonel asks Hero to "undo himself," stating, "First, we will do a visual inspection and then we'll do more than just look. As my own father used to say, Never trust the eye in these 'private' matters, Only trust what your hand can tell you."[574] The Colonel's request comes seemingly out of the blue – an indication that The Colonel's power is unraveling as the dynamics between captor and captive blur. The lines also hint at The Colonel's sexual fetishization of Hero's body. Hero's prowess is his own prowess, something he owns but something he cannot fully have. As Hero stands silent, deciding whether to comply or risk his life in refusing, the audience feels his pain and humiliation.

As Diamond coached the actor playing The Colonel from the sidelines, she focused her attention on "amplifying the conflict."[575] At times, Diamond let the scene play out, only stopping to consult with the choreographer, Randy Duncan, privately. In my notes, I scribbled the question, "Does she know this is not working?"[576] On these difficult rehearsal days, Diamond remained exceedingly engaged, asking the actor questions about his character, offering ideas for creating a more "authoritative" posture, and sometimes sitting on the floor with the actor to discuss the character's psychology. From the sidelines she would coach the actor, interjecting to push the actor even further into the mire by telling him to "be the thing itself."[577] Finally, in what

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[574] *Father Comes Home*, 79.
[575] *Father Comes Home From the Wars*, Rehearsal, March 5, 2018.
[576] Ibid.
[577] Ibid.

I observed to be a final attempt on the director's part to reconcile what the scene needs – a racist villain – and what the actor is portraying – a reluctant white supremacist – Diamond asked the actor to "make a performance of a Southern soldier."[578]

From my vantage point, it seemed probable that the actor playing The Colonel was resistant to embodying a violently racist character, a phenomenon outlined by Brandon Jacob-Jenkins in *An Octoroon.* In the opening scene of that play, his character "BJJ" (a Black playwright, or himself) is speaking to his therapist about adapting one of his favorite racist plays, *The Octoroon* by Dion Boucicault:

> Okay…Well here's an idea:
> Why don't you try adapting this *'Octoroon'* – for fun.
> I think it's important to re-connect with things
> you feel or have felt positive feelings for."
> So I did. Or tried to.
> But then all the white guys quit.
> And then I couldn't find any more white guys
> to play any of the white guy parts,
> because they all felt it was too "melodramatic."[579]

While casting his original adaptation, Jacob-Jenkins found it nearly impossible to find white actors willing to portray a white supremacist. White supremacy, after all, is in direct opposition to the cultural narrative that tells white people their privilege is a product of hard work. Acknowledging America's history of white supremacy means acknowledging that Black bodies have been and continue to be marginalized because of structural policies put in place by the very forefathers we are taught to revere. For white actors, the tension between continuing to have and wield a now naturalized privilege and embodying the source of that privilege is, perhaps, an acknowledgement that white privilege is sustained through willful ignorance. As Peggy McIntosh outlines in "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," "As a white person,

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[578] Ibid.
[579] Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, *An Octoroon* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2017), 8.

I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage."[580] In other words, to embody a racist character is to confront how one benefits from racism – especially when this point is written so poignantly into the script.

While the actor playing The Colonel seemingly resisted embodying the more violent aspects associated with whiteness, the actor playing Smith (a Black man who could pass for white) seemed to outright refuse to adopt cultural identifiers of race in his characterization. It is important to note that the actor playing Smith was not only white but was described by the assistant director, Kat Yen, as being difficult; she said he "lacked respect for her position and refused her direction."[581] I overheard him during one rehearsal regaling his fellow actors with a story of going to the opera the previous evening and talking so loudly during the performance that he was asked to leave. He seemed to have no sense of himself in relation to others and comported himself as someone who has always enjoyed a fair amount of privilege. Of course, the actor's behavior could be indicative of many things, including deep feelings of inadequacy. It did not feel, however, as if this actor had an access point into Smith. Unlike what Torange Yeghiazarian promotes – "I look for cultural competence. By this I mean, in Golden Thread's case, the lived experience of otherness, of exclusion"[582] – it seemed as if the actor playing Smith had little access to the lived experience of otherness.

I would contend that Smith was miscast. At the same time, the role was originated by a white-identified actor (Louis Cancelmi). Perhaps intentionally, Parks leaves the casting open, allowing for an interesting exchange on colorism. During much of the scene, Smith is

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[580] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (Peace and Freedom July/August 1989), 1.
[581] *Father Comes Home From the Wars,* Rehearsal, February 20, 2018.
[582] Yeghiazarian, "ReOrienting," 69.

condescending, indignant, and self-righteous. When Smith tells Hero to run away, Smith demonstrates how the precariousness of where one is born (geography), one's privilege (or access to privilege), and one's visible identifiers (of race) culminate in very different experiences of Blackness. As represented by a body that can pass for white, the precariousness and manufactured nature of race is made apparent.

The actor playing Smith, however, seemed to shut himself off from having difficult conversations about these racialized dimensions of his character. When Diamond asked him to use a rural Southern accent to sound more like Hero – in an effort to signify some common ground between the two men – the actor was visibly uncomfortable. Sensing this discomfort, Diamond asked, "You don't want to be a white actor trying to sound Black?"[583] He nodded and looked nervously at the Black actor playing Hero (who was also donning a Southern accent for the role). In the same way that The Colonel could not or did not want to play a racist character, Smith indicated that "acting Black" would implicate him in a racist activity. Yet, in refusing to engage with race, Smith effectively white-washed the character.

In "Hidden Damage: When Uninformed Casting and Actor Training Disregard the Effect of Character Embodiment on Students of Color," Kaja Amado Dunn demonstrates the ways in which acting programs are "designed for white students with a white canon"[584] and have contributed to the erasure of cultural specificity. Citing Claire Zhuang, who penned "A Parting Letter to My MFA Program," Dunn identifies the "immense frustration experienced by students of color:"

> Theatre has never been a safe place for me…If institutions across the nation are teaching students unexamined sets of assumptions about what American theatre has been, is, and

[583] *Father Comes Home From the War* rehearsal (Yale Repertory Theatre), February 20, 2018.
[584] Kaja Amado Dunn, "Hidden Damage: When Uninformed Casting and Actor Training Disregard the Effect of Character Embodiment on Students of Color" (*Theatre Symposium: A Journal of the Southeastern Theatre Conference 27*, January 1, 2019), 69.

> can be…I see no place for myself in theatre because theatre as an institution (which I think it often forgets it is one) has not identified a way to properly engage and understand itself as a locus of domination; as a location that also perpetuates and upholds white supremacist values.[585]

Dunn asserts that training programs assume the "white body and culture as the universal standard in its development,"[586] an assumption that ultimately serves to erase bodies of color. This is especially important given that Yale is one of the top drama programs in the nation and the actor playing Smith was a graduate of the program. Dunn's argument invokes Nicole Brewer's call for hiring more directors (and teachers) of color in the hopes of creating a rehearsal container that resists whiteness as a "neutral" character choice.

When cultural specificity is removed from acting programs, white students learn that they do not have to engage with difference. Their bodies, their mannerisms, their ways of maneuvering the world are the "correct" way. When whiteness is a cultural neutral, the act of *not* engaging with race becomes its own neutrality. In other words, white actors do not have an artistic or ethical obligation to do other than they've always done. Moreover, white actors grow to view culturally-specific embodiment as its own form of racism. Conquergood likens this to an actor who is "struggling with the ethical tensions and moral ambiguities of performing culturally sensitive materials" flatly declaring that "I am neither black nor female: I will not perform from *The Color Purple.*"[587] As Madison writes about The Skeptics Cop-Out, "With cavalier certainty, he claims he cannot embody or engage an identity outside his own."[588]

In refusing to engage with certain aspects of these culturally-specific characters, the actors playing The Colonel and Smith refused to engage in the psychological work of distancing

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[585] Ibid.
[586] Ibid.
[587] Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 8.
[588] Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 12.

themselves from their characters (something actors of color are required to do all the time, both in and out of the rehearsal room). Conquergood invokes code-switching as an example of the cultural labor commonly performed by people of color: "Code-switching is a commonplace ethnographic term used to describe the complex shifts minority peoples deftly and continuously negotiate between the communication styles of dominant and subculture."[589]

In describing the fluidity of code-switching, Soyini Madison narrates the story of a group of scholars having dinner after a lecture. As the dinner winds on, two of the scholars – one of them the visiting lecturer and one of them a member of the lecture committee - discuss what it was like being Black graduate students navigating an Ivy League institution. Madison conveys the fluidity with which these two women change their speech patterns – the difference between how they addressed the entire table of scholars and how they now address each other:

> They were interacting with a familiarity and intimacy in the way they spoke—intonation, pitch, tone—and how they employed language. Their word pronunciations, grammatical arrangements, vocal textures, vernacular phrasings, and gestural expressions had now changed. These Black women were now code switching to another Black identity that was genuine, intrinsic, and deeply held for them, but unfamiliar and foreign for the committee members.[590]

Madison notes that code-switching is a technique "learned from a shared tradition and culture embodied through family and community rituals, practices, and knowledges of Black vernacular speech."[591] The demand to code-switch indicates that people of color are regularly put in the uncomfortable position of navigating dominant cultural ideologies. In refusing to engage in a dialogue about difference or discuss the ways in which these specific cultural markers can be ethically embodied, the white actors working with Diamond used privilege to shield themselves from the difficult work of collaboration.

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[589] Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 8.
[590] Madison, *Performed Ethnography and Communication*, 12.
[591] Ibid.

Because resistance manifested by white privilege often masquerades as an artistic roadblock or a condition of one's ego, the director may find herself spending a disproportionate amount of time working with actors who exhibit these resistances. In discussing rehearsals with The Colonel, Diamond told me:

> What I was struggling to calibrate with [actor's name omitted] was how to understand what was happening as I watched him work. I found myself, at times, puzzled by what I perceived to be, for lack of a better description, a lack of imagination. I thought, you know, you're not making choices. He didn't seem to be using the space, using the objects in the space, marking his own understanding of the journey, of the character in the scene, just seemed to be sort of intermittent and vague and I found myself struck by a kind of lack of specificity, for lack of a better word. That led me to ride hard on him, as you saw. I mean I spent a lot of time stopping him because I kept thinking, "You missed that moment. How about this?"[592]

In the same way Diamond spent energy on The Colonel, she struggled to frame Blackness (in the context of the play) within other cultural identifiers, such as class and geography, for Smith (although she tried). Ultimately, Smith's performance remained unchanged throughout the rehearsal process, making me wonder if Diamond simply gave up on trying to get what she needed from him and decided, instead, to work with the other performers to act around him — essentially, asking the Black actors to do more of the artistic labor to compensate for, as Diamond put it, a general "lack."

The perils of directing within a facilit*auteur* framework is that it assumes one's artistic collaborators will also do the hard work of engaging in the dialogical exchange. When working with different personalities, there is no foolproof approach to having difficult conversations surrounding white privilege. However, it is important to open the space for these conversations. Engaging with ethnographic, dramaturgical, and even theoretical underpinnings within the play and rehearsal room at large can provide blueprints for directors seeking to have these difficult

[592] Diamond interview.

conversations. As Conquergood states, "The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kink of performance that resists conclusions. It is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing."[593] In other words, it resists one point of view.

Conclusion

> *It's like the agony and the joy of directing is to create that space for artistic collaborators, designers, actors, the dramaturg in the room, to create a sense of, 'You have a huge stake in this because I want you to be heard. 'Cause I care about what you can give to this.' And you have to make your AD feel that way, and you've gotta make your dramaturg feel that way and the whole team. And it's all going be aimed at creating this container for the actors to flourish…*[594]
>
> - Liz Diamond

In *Upstaging Big Daddy,* Ellen Donkin writes, "A director's personal style is one element among many in the complex system called mode of production, which sees to it that whatever is produced ultimately reproduces dominant ideology. The way we direct is part of that system, and we need therefore to become conscious of our own processes…"[595] As Donkin notes, a "director's personal style" often replicates dominant ideologies. Gone unchecked, unquestioned, and unexamined, systems of oppression can be easily replicated by directors through their process. Artistic freedom often serves as an umbrella that maintains white supremacy and reinforces artistic hierarchies. However, representation for representation's sake is also problematic and can enact a sort of violence on the bodies tasked with doing the representing.

Navigating the sticky terrain of culturally-specific texts is a complicated undertaking. Brewer's call for an immediate influx of directors of color to direct plays by playwrights of color is an important component in achieving more culturally-competent rehearsal spaces. Brewer's position is not a radical one. Donkin included a similar call almost thirty years ago:

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[593] Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 14.
[594] Diamond interview.
[595] Donkin and Clement, *Upstaging Big Daddy,* 80.

> The issue has to be carefully contextualized: a white director needs to be clear that the immediate project at hand is to actively intervene in the exclusionary cycle of canonical shows and to invest in a new generation of directors who may someday enter academic theater as colleagues. It is not a substitute for having directors of color; it is a transitional measure toward training those directors. Traditional white liberalism warns that the white director working on a black play may be preempting a director of color, or that she or he will impose white cultural values on a black text.[596]

At the same time, one has to be careful that this call is not instituted by relegating directors to solely directing plays based on their identity markers – another type of artistic ghettoization that is neither sustainable nor desired. Furthermore, it is not possible that any one director will be the authority on any one experience. Even with texts that do not demand cultural specificity, the text likely demands other sorts of specificities, including geographic, historical, temporal, and others. In order to effectively lead *any* production with *any* sort of specificity, a director must create an effective exchange with other artists in the room. In other words, a director must collaborate.

I posit that radical collaboration is necessary in creating an effective and culturally responsible performance. Moreover, that collaboration is a methodology. Diamond's emphasis on collaboration is part of Yale's curriculum. All first-semester students are required to take "The Collaborative Process" course taught by Liz Diamond and Catherine Sheehy. In it, the director-dramaturg duo ask, "How does decision-making evolve in a horizontal devising model?"[597] A director's mode of being in the rehearsal room, their way of interacting with other artists, are vital elements in the kind of performances they will ultimately produce. As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, these are skills that are cultivated by women directors as a means of survival. The directing discipline is changing, and collaborative skillsets have become

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[596] Ibid.

[597] David Geffen School of Drama at Yale, *Directing Plan of Study,* https://www.drama.yale.edu/training/directing/plan-of-study/).

more valued. This shift comes in conjunction with the demand for representation, more culturally competent productions, and thoughtful interrogations of hegemonic directing practices.

As an intersectional discipline, directing benefits from the hard work of ethnographers who have sought to create a blueprint for recognizing and reconciling a director's power and subjectivity. From an ethnographical perspective, this involves setting out a "central question" that leads the artists to grapple with what is not known. From this position of not knowing, the director looks to their collaborators' multiple perspectives, or multivocality, that tend to mitigate any one authority and offer multiple entrances into otherness. Dialogical exchanges are facilitated through "active thinking" and "sympathetic listening" – ways of thinking and listening that are not motivated by judgment – allowing directors to "turn back" on themselves, becoming reflexive ethnographers able to interrogate systems of power while acknowledging their own privileges and biases.

In addition, ethnographers interrogate the ethical dilemmas and repercussions that occur when one does *not* take great care in addressing cultural specificity. Soyini Madison creates an outline of "methods and ethics" in her book, *Critical Ethnography,* by pulling from the organizational "codes of ethics" found in the National Association of Social Workers and the American Anthropology Association.[598] Madison investigates the various responsibilities of the ethnographer including getting informed consent, discussing remuneration, creating an environment of transparency, and thinking through any negative impacts of the work. This rigorous model for encountering otherness can be extremely useful for directors who want to establish an ethical approach to directing outside of their specific identity. In an artistic discipline built on working with others, hopefully, that's what we are always doing.

[598] Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 110.

CONCLUSION

Why don't we just close down these factories of make-believe and give all the money, time, and effort to more tangible salves and solves like fair housing, voting rights, and lawmaking that really forward those lofty American ideals of equality, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness for all? Why in the world do I insist on making theatre? Maybe it's because it's the tool I know how to use most proficiently, even as I practice with the rest. And am I, in continuing to make theatre, complicit in the racial, cultural, and gender-biased systems that are perpetuated in every facet of this field? Still, I make theatre and I have to change how I make theatre. Even as the "why" remains the same. – Tamilla Woodard[599]

In June 2021, I became the artistic director of a community theater in South Dakota. Having just finished a draft of my dissertation, I had a strong sense of the facilit*auteur* I hoped to emulate in my new position. The job felt like an opportunity for me to put my research into practice in a holistic way.

The theater had been in existence in one form or another for over fifty years, operating on a small to midsize budget – around $500,000. During the final stages of the interview process, I got the sense there might be some cultural issues that would need addressing if I were to take the job. The executive director hinted that I would be inheriting some problems the previous artistic director created, most notably a lack of inclusive casting practices. The education director told me outright that he felt as if his department had been siloed from the rest of the theater's artistic offerings. The technical director informed me that the theater simply did not have the resources to adequately support some of the larger scale musicals that made the theater money. In addition to the theater's preexisting cultural practices, my tenure as artistic director would mark the theater's official opening since the pandemic. As a facilit*auteur,* I entered this new position thinking I was prepared with the vision needed and the toolkit required for doing the hard work of facilitating cultural and practical change.

[599] Tamilla Woodard, "The Work of the Imagination," *HowlRound,* October 20, 2022.

The theater's paid staff were exclusively white, and the community it served was predominantly white. Locally, there was a significant Indigenous population, but the theater had not figured out how to dialogue with their Native neighbors. The theater had never (yes, never) produced a playwright of color. The theater's racial anxieties were not markedly different than those I had experienced at Cornell. The staff were concerned they could not cast shows with diverse roles given their predominantly white acting pool. The theater served a mostly white, conservative audience and there was fear that any play with political undertones might scare away an audience that had been responsible for supporting the theater for decades.

The executive director and board of directors initially embraced my feminist ideals, as I sought to identify areas of the theater that could become more inclusive. I tried to make changes slowly. At first, it felt intuitive. Being the artistic director was like being a director, just on a larger scale. Instead of confining facilit*auteur* concepts to a rehearsal room, I expanded their application to the entire theatrical company. I positioned myself as an ethnographic researcher, observing the theater's programming, the staff and volunteers' interpersonal relationships, and the ways the theater did or did not engage with the community. I had dialogical exchanges with the education department to identify ways we could create "low stakes" artistic offerings in an effort to increase our participatory reach. I decentered myself, asked questions, and found ways to bring the entire staff into artistic planning discussions.

Within my first couple of months, we developed and implemented new programming geared towards providing more opportunities for existing artists and entrance point opportunities for first-time actors. Within six months, I had secured over $20,000 in grants to increase our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. I established a partnership with a visiting community-based theater that was developing programming with the local Indigenous (Lakota) community.

The partnership had the potential to help the theater establish more Indigenous-centered programming. In addition, I secured funding for a prominent Lakota/South Dakota playwright to be our "artist-in-residence" for the season. I started a DEI Committee to identify how DEI funds should be spent and to serve as an access point for funneling people of color onto the board. By the summer of 2022, the DEI Committee was planning an "Open House" replete with food trucks, family-friendly crafts, live bands, and Indigenous artistry.

Despite my successes, there were what felt like unending challenges. Without any real COVID protocols set in place, myself, the executive director, the board president, and members of the production team made the decision to cancel the season's first show after several actors fell ill during tech week. After a few months, one of the theater's volunteers confessed to me that there was a history of sexual misconduct among previous male directors. I found out that the person who ran the costume shop was fatphobic, outright refusing to costume actors with bigger bodies. When I cast a transgender actor in the theater's annual holiday play, two actors quit, claiming that the show was not "community-oriented." One actor told me they were reporting my disregard for the "spirit of the holidays" to the Board. After the show was over, the executive director told me in no uncertain terms that he wanted a more "traditional" show next season.

Despite all of these challenges, I kept myself grounded through the methodologies described in this dissertation. I used empathy. I listened. I widened the circle of our volunteer-artists, establishing them as leaders within the theater. I instituted consent-based rehearsal room policies. I offered my unending support to our guest artists. I advocated for staff. I was transparent and collaborative in decision-making. I interrogated the theater's history of whiteness with the board and staff. I took inspiration from other artists engaging in this hard work and did all the things that I needed to do to make real, institutional change.

It didn't work. In making decisions surrounding artistic integrity and basic workplace safety, the desires of donors came first *and last.*

During the last show of the season, a child actor tested positive for COVID during tech week. I let the parent know that as per our newly-instituted COVID guidelines, her child would need to be absent from the next five days of rehearsals/performances before testing again. The parent went over my head to the executive director to appeal this decision – not an uncommon occurrence. The executive director, telling me that the parent was an important donor, allowed the child to return to rehearsals *with COVID.* I went to the board to express my feeling that this was a dangerous decision on the part of the executive director. Because of this "act of insubordination," I was asked to resign.

Facilit*auteur* is about leadership within the rehearsal room. But what about outside of the rehearsal room? As an artistic director, I was naive about the role of institutional leadership. I had, and have, been so focused on artistic leadership that I neglected to consider how other leaders within an institution – namely, board members – contribute to an inequitable institutional culture.

Are We Bored of Boards Yet?

Theatre artists are some of the most creative people in the entire world. Theatre incorporates all forms of art: visual, musical, dance, text, all alive and happening in the moment. We have the magical ability to see new worlds in our heads and bring those worlds and ideas to life in a relatively short time frame. We're expert imaginators. So why haven't we yet reimagined theatre as an equitable field, free from racism, showing the world as we imagine it? And why haven't we imagined a new accountability structure rather than the broken board-of-directors model? Are we actually not as imaginative as we purport to be, or is this problem yet another symptom of the oppression of racism and classism?[600] – Michael J. Bobbitt

[600] Michael J. Bobbitt, "Boards Are Broken, So Let's Break and Remake Them," *American Theatre*, January 5, 2021.

On June 9, 2022, a cohort of artists from the Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago sent a letter to Victory Gardens' board of directors expressing their support for the then artistic director, Ken-Matt Martin.[601] Martin had told the theater's resident directors and playwrights that he was considering resigning. Although Martin was vague about his reasons why, the artists speculated that it had to do with Martin and the acting managing director, Roxanna Conner, being shut out of a major financial decision. On June 30, Martin published a blog post announcing that he had been fired from his position. Additionally, Connor said she would be stepping down.[602] In Martin's post, he wrote:

> American theaters are not built to center the needs of the artists or the staff. They are top-heavy institutions that cater to donors' preferences, that twist themselves into pretzels to fit foundations' latest giving priorities, and that give boards composed of professionals from other fields ultimate sway over how theater is made.[603]

The staff and artists at Victory Gardens were quick to publicly show their support for Martin and Connor, demanding that the board resign to allow for a new board of artists to take its place. In an unbelievable response, the board fired all of the remaining theater staff after they tried to unionize. Victory Gardens is now in the process of transitioning from a producing organization into a foundation.

In a *New York Times* article about the debacle, Mark Caro writes:

> Just over a year later he [Martin] has now joined a group of Black artistic leaders recently separated from the institutions they had been hired to lead. Elsewhere in Chicago, the House Theater closed its doors this summer after its new artistic director, Lanise Antoine Shelley, had presented just two shows; Jon Carr, the Second City executive producer, left his position in February after 14 months; and Regina Victor, artistic director of Sideshow Theater, resigned on July 20.[604]

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[601] isaac gómez, "We Resign," *Medium*, July 6, 2022.
[602] Ken-Matt Martin, "For Those Doing the Work," Ken-Matt Martin website, July 19, 2022. http://www.kenmatt.com
[603] Ibid.
[604] Mark Caro, "Rebounding From a Revolt, Victory Gardens Is Again Mired in Turmoil," *New York Times*, August 1, 2022.

The *New York Times* was quick to point out that Martin is one in a growing list of artistic leaders – predominantly women and people of color – who have resigned or been fired after having conflicts with their board. Caro notes that many of these conflicts arise when organizations put their financial bottom line above the "creation of theater."[605] In his post, Martin urged other organizations to view Victory Gardens as not just "one institution's dysfunction, but as an example of the industry-wide need to seriously reevaluate our models and modes of operating."[606]

Victory Gardens' cautionary tale is complicated by the robust antiracist efforts that were put forth by Martin and Connor. In the comprehensive call to action, "Dear White American Theatre, Our Demands Are In," signed by Martin, artists of color across the country have demanded a substantial power shift within the discipline. In the section on "Principles for Building Anti-Racist Theatre Systems," the document states: "Antiracism must become a mandatory, well budgeted, and explicit core value, with interventionist practices implemented universally and consistently to dismantle white supremacy throughout institutions and project workflow."[607]

Note the words, "well budgeted."

During a staff and board retreat, the South Dakota theater I worked for named "equity and inclusion" as its top priority. I remember distinctly a board member saying that if the theater was not inclusive, it did not deserve to be a theater. A few months later, I was faced with the executive director's willingness to risk the well-being of an entire production for the sake of keeping one donor happy. That's when I realized that if the threat of one privileged white woman

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[605] Ibid.
[606] Ken-Matt Martin, "For Those Doing the Work."
[607] "We See You, White American Theatre," www.weseeyouwat.com.

could efface COVID policies the board had helped create, there was little chance that an issue as challenging, contested, and slippery as dismantling white supremacy would be supported. Especially if that support demanded money.

There has always been tension between funding and artmaking. *We don't do it for the money, but we need money to do it.* In Martin's post, he praised most board members at Victory Gardens for working hard to keep the doors open. Of course, within an organization, such efforts often require making tough financial decisions. However, when theaters are run like businesses, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep ethical, artist-centered practices at the forefront. And yet, the post-pandemic era has seen a wave of proposals for reimagining the theater as both an artistic space and a workplace.

In "Boards Are Broken, So Let's Break and Remake Them," Michael J. Bobbitt interrogates his role on a theater's board of directors, asking:

> Is all this work for the benefit of the organization or for the benefit of the board?... This leads me to a series of questions: Was the board model set up incorrectly from the start, or was a good idea corrupted over a period of time? Are there any "best practices" that could reform the model? Are boards actually doing what they are legally or morally supposed to do? Are boards actually equipped with the skills and time to manage or oversee leadership? Should the board be governing, or should this work be done primarily by those carrying out the mission?[608]

Bobbitt identifies some key issues with theater boards, including that they meet relatively infrequently; many members do not have theater expertise; they are given ultimate decision-making power; they have become another program for staff to "manage;" they often do not reflect the theater's community; and their members are held accountable to no one.

Bobbitt offers a few ways to approach the "problem of boards." He asserts that boards need not serve as the financial arm of an organization. He notes that many board practices, such

[608] Michael J. Bobbitt, "Boards Are Broken."

as bylaws and Robert's Rules of Order, are rituals rooted in white supremacy that do not carry any legal or ethical significance. He recommends changing the names of theater boards to something like "accountability advisors" in an effort to reflect their duties, which he asserts are to center the most marginalized of artists. He advocates for diverse, artist-centered boards that serve as "ambassadors, not overlords." And finally, he states that staff and artists should be involved – and even privileged – in the hiring of executive staff and in the selection of future board members. Bobbitt writes, "…we have to consider that *nothing in the American theatre industry practices to this point should be considered sacred, beyond question, or unchangeable*."[609]

In developing a more artist-centered organization, some theater managers are turning towards Human Resource (HR) models. In "From the Top Down: The Importance of HR in Theatre," Kit Ingui, managing director of Long Wharf Theatre, discusses the values of HR in theater organizations. Ingui explains that the staff at Long Wharf experienced a fair amount of trauma during the tenure of the previous artistic director who was ultimately terminated after his history of sexual harassment came to light. In trying to change the fear-based culture that existed at Long Wharf, Ingui joined the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and Parent Artist Advocacy League (PAAL), which offer organizations HR materials, support, and management guidance. As Ingui notes, "We're in the midst of transforming an organization that had gotten stuck in its ways. We are trying to transform the culture into one that is radically inclusive, that attends to its people, that considers its staff its highest priority."[610]

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[609] Michael J. Bobbitt, "Boards Are Broken."
[610] Iris McQuillan-Grace, "From the Top Down: The Importance of HR in Theatre," interview with Kit Ingui, *HowlRound,* October 25, 2022.

Ingui cites "We See You, White American Theater" and adrienne maree brown's book *Emergent Strategies: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (2017) as guideposts for changing culture at the "speed of trust."[611] Ingui asserts that while productions may come and go quickly, her role is to attend to the theater's culture that remains behind. Ingui first and foremost recommends that theater managers listen to and believe staff, noting that most staff work with Long Wharf because they care about the art the organization makes. Ingui asserts that the most important thing for theaters is to start making changes slowly – *but to actually make change.* For Long Wharf, this has included creating clear job descriptions, building a more equitable system for staff performance reviews, training management and staff on how to give respectful feedback, and benchmarking salaries. Ingui notes that it is sometimes difficult to protect the HR budget when, for example, the scenic designer needs more money for a set. However, she also believes a theater's budget reflects its values, and argues for protecting these non-production budgets at all costs.

In "The Work of the Imagination," director Tamilla Woodard imagines what a radical restructuring of theatrical institutions might look like in a post-pandemic era. Woodard advocates for theater-makers to look at theater as community organizing. Instead of treating audiences like consumers, organizations should ask the community what they *need*, and respond to the answers as if they are providing their community with a social service. Woodard encourages theaters to think about access, both in terms of their audiences and the artists they work with. Overall, she champions prioritizing the needs of a community of artists over the brick and mortar institution.

In many ways, my time in South Dakota changed my previously held view that theater should exist *at any cost*. During this time of post-pandemic social and political change, we, as a

[611] Iris McQuillan-Grace, "From the Top Down."

culture, are reevaluating where we want to put our resources. If theater is to make the cut, it will need to change in response to the cultural demands of its artists and workers. The patriarchal, white supremacist, capitalist values embedded in theater's design are simply not serving the discipline anymore. I believe that in reimagining and creating new practices for making theater, the facilit*auteur* can help facilitate change.

As stated in the introduction to this project, I take inspiration from feminist artistic leaders who have paved the way for this particular moment in time. The figure of the facilit*auteur* is heavily influenced by the interdisciplinarity exemplified by theater-makers such as Rhodessa Jones and Lois Weaver, who work at the intersections of theater, community-building, and social service. The kind of dexterity these women exemplify is exactly what the discipline needs in order to stay responsive to these cultural shifts. These artists are adept at creating entire new systems of thought that have the potential to displace current structures of power. Perhaps theater will not survive in its current form. Hopefully, what rises up from the ashes will be a more ethical version of a discipline that always sought to reflect our core humanity.

The facilit*auteur* is not just someone you hire to put on a show; she is entrenched in the hard and responsive work of engaging with ever-changing best practices that reflect our cultural values. With empathy, flexibility, and cultural competency she remakes theater, and then she remakes it again and again and again.

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