

**zAmya Theater Project:
Toward an Intimacy of Social Change**

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Foreword

I had just left a zAmya Theater Project workshop at a Salvation Army shelter in downtown Minneapolis where I had spent two hours playing theater games and participating in story-circles with people experiencing homelessness. I was struck by what one of zAmya's longtime actors, Larry Brown, had said during an improvisation: "Being homeless, it scars you: your mind, your heart, your body. It takes the life out of you." Brooding over Larry's comment, and keenly aware of my own privilege as I left the shelter, I drove to meet my husband Greg and his work colleagues at a downtown bar. They had spent the day helping to remodel a dilapidated home for a family in need in St. Paul as part of an outreach program sponsored by their employer (they worked for a construction company). On our way home that night, Greg told me about the conversation he and his boss (let's call him Richard) had right before I arrived. Greg had explained to Richard what I had been doing that day – making theater with people who resided in a temporary housing facility – and that it was the focus of my dissertation project. With a cynical laugh Richard had replied, "Why doesn't she just help them find housing?"

Why not, indeed? Richard's version of charity was defined by meeting basic life needs, such as housing, and his response to the way I had spent my time that day clearly disputed the value of doing theater as a means of making some change in the world. I must admit, for a time, it made me begin to doubt its value as well. Why on earth would someone spend time playing *games* and telling *stories* with people who didn't know where they were going to sleep that night, who didn't have health

insurance, who weren't sure where their next meal was coming from, who, as Larry had said so artfully, had the life taken out of them?

Richard's question has irritated me for years, mostly because I thought I already knew the answer. This dissertation is my ongoing musing in response to his implicit provocation (what good is theater?), and operates under the guiding principle that being alive (which is helped along by being housed and fed) and *feeling* alive are two different projects. Construction might address one concern, but theater has a way of addressing the other.

Chapter One

Introduction

In 2009, I attended a workshop at a national conference dedicated to activist theater. The workshop was an introduction to political theater techniques, and started out with a few warm-up games which were designed as ice-breakers but also as a means of raising political consciousness. We were asked to divide ourselves, without speaking, according to our skin color. The first silent division resulted in two groups, one composed of white people and one composed of people of color. Then we were asked, in each group, to come up with a name for ourselves (this game came on the heels of similar games where we divided ourselves according to shirt color, shoe type, etc). The group of white participants, unable to agree on a name, gradually fractured into three smaller groups, each of which deliberated at length and with much enthusiasm about how to represent themselves. My group arrived at the name “pink with freckles,” another group called themselves “tan,” and the third group, who deliberated the longest, finally proclaimed loudly that their group was called “white *privilege!*” The group composed of people of color had remained a single group, and had waited quietly while the rest of the room arrived at their conclusions. (I think it is significant to note that the ruckus produced by the white groups’ deliberations (mine included) has obliterated the name of the group of people of color from my memory – my attention was so taken up by this other activity I don’t remember what name they called themselves.)

After the group names had finally been decided upon, the facilitator asked for feedback about the exercise, and here is where my main point lies. I counted seven

rapid fire responses from the white groups (seven!) before even one person of color could get a word in edgewise to this discussion. The “white privilege” group was the most vocal. While they were certainly making an effort to acknowledge that they had privilege and to stage a critique of that privilege (in other words, the “content” of their response was oppositional), their *actions* (monopolizing the conversation) were deeply oppressive. I felt the urge to raise my voice and point out this contradiction between language and practice, but I didn’t want to be yet another white voice monopolizing the feedback session, and I also didn’t want to castigate this group of extremely well-meaning individuals who were trying to grapple with their own privilege. I was conflicted about the way I allowed oppression, even in what might be considered a benign way, to be perpetuated. I felt paralyzed, knowing that something was wrong, that I had in fact contributed to it, but not knowing how to proceed without making the situation worse.

In this project I investigate community-based theater (CBT), especially when it has activist yearnings, or could be classified under the banner of theater for social change. I conduct this investigation through my ethnographic work with a CBT in Minneapolis, MN called zAmya Theater Project, which creates a yearly play about homelessness with theater professionals and non-self-identified performers, people who have experienced homelessness as well as those who consider themselves allies. My initial research question was formed as a gut-level response to Richard’s sassy inquiry at that bar three years ago: What does it mean for theater, generally speaking, to be efficacious, and are those criteria different for a theater dedicated to “social change”?

My desire to investigate and theorize community-based, activist theater is also fueled by the observation that even the most well-intentioned activist theater practitioners may be led astray from making efficacious work when their focus on “getting the right message across” leads them to ignore or even aggravate the *relational practices* engendered by their efforts (such as in the story I just told).¹

Mainstream and activist theater is often differentiated along these lines: its content (*The Wizard of Oz* vs. an adaptation or devised performance); where it performs (the Guthrie vs. a church basement); the kind of actor employed (professional/trained vs. amateur); or its intent (entertainment vs. education/awareness). Activist theater tends to prioritize process over product, and values the kinds of messages voiced in the production more than its aesthetics. Mainstream theater very much values the aesthetic product because it tends to rely on the patronage of its customers to continue producing work.

I would like to get away from this delineation between mainstream and activist performance by suggesting a new criteria for efficacious activist performance. I propose that any kind of theater, in any venue, with any actor, can be called activist if it attends to, not primarily the kind of information being relayed to the audience, but to the way the performance event produces and/or critiques relational practices. By these terms, theater may legitimately be said to engage in efficacious activism if it produces, not the kinds of relationships based on the objectifying gaze that Martin Heidegger calls *enframing*, but if it instead strives for what I call *an intimacy of social change*, an

¹ Relational practice is political theorist Massimo De Angelis’ term to describe the site at which everyday activities “give rise to values and modes of doing and relating in social co-production” (“Enclosures” 1).

activism based on creating compassionate relationships between humans, rather than hierarchizing theater's participants into subject and object, spectator and spectacle, consumer and consumed, the way that dominant space organizes so many of our social relations, often without our awareness or explicit consent.

In order to discuss the relevance of an intimacy of social change in the theater, I will begin this chapter by drawing on philosophers Henri Lefebvre and Martin Heidegger to theorize dominant space, an oppressive space rooted in representations and pervasive visuality designed to perpetuate capitalist economics. This groundwork is vital to understanding what an intimacy of social change in the theater is responding to. Next, I am able to theorize an intimacy of social change because of the time I have spent as ethnographer with zAmya Theater Project, participating in rehearsals and workshops, watching performances, and discussing the process with its participants. After theorizing dominant space, I will spend the next part of this chapter introducing and contextualizing zAmya, and locating my own research about this theater project within the body of scholarship that investigates community-based theater and its related disciplines. I will end this chapter with an outline and brief commentary on the rest of the dissertation. Chapters two through four each delve into one of three sites – spatializing gestures, affective flows, and narrative acts – in which an intimacy of social change in the theater may occur. The fifth and final chapter articulates a theory of intimacy by reviewing moments of efficacious social change at zAmya described in chapters two through four, and rooting those moments in the Buddhist theory of non-attachment, or the practice of being intimate with lived experience without performing a gesture of mastery over it. The major assertion of this last chapter, and hence the

dissertation, is that Buddhist intimacy interrupts the techniques of oppression wielded by dominant space, and that this intimacy is a practice the theater is well-suited to cultivate.

Negotiating Dominant Space

An intimacy of social change in the theater attempts to transform the kinds of relationships created in and naturalized by dominant space. Dominant space assumes and retains power through a sophisticated machinery of tactics of erasure and sublimation, employing the sign-image as its imperial banner and most industrious workhorse. For the purposes of this study, the architecture of dominant space is most compellingly theorized by two philosophers: Henri Lefebvre and Martin Heidegger. Although a Marxist and a phenomenologist may first appear to be strange bedfellows, I use both theorists to discuss the way dominant space reduces the lived body to image, depriving it of history and dimension, and then re-presents that body-image so that it might be accommodated within the circulation and accumulation of commodities. I will then describe homelessness as a site (constructed through a series of representations) specifically engineered by dominant space to normalize capitalist activity like homeownership, and to de-humanize those who operate in more informal or alternative economies. It is this very dominant space against which peripheral spaces, like the arts, attempt to stage their opposition.

In his densely theoretical volume about how social space is produced differently by various historical political logics or systems, *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre calls contemporary Western space, following Marx, *abstract space*. Abstract

space is today's dominant space. Abstract space is the space of ideologies: it is "formal and quantitative," it "sets itself up as the space of power" and at the same time conceals that power (*Production* 49, 51). Most insidiously, abstract space is a hegemonic space, in which its "users" rarely protest their manipulation (51). Abstract space perpetuates itself through the use of signs and images, "pass[ing] itself off as a true world" (389). If one were to describe a phenomenology of abstract space, it would today be characterized by a "vast network of banks, business centres, and major productive entities, . . . motorways, airports and information lattices" (53).

Lefebvre defines abstract space partially in contradiction to a space produced by an earlier political logic: *absolute space* was a space in ancient Greek culture created upon or reminiscent of a natural site, such as a cave or meadow, but which soon became marked by the politics of its production. Lefebvre explains: "At once civil and religious, absolute space thus preserved and incorporated bloodlines, family, *unmediated relationships* – but it transposed them to the city, to the political state founded on the town" (48 emphasis added).² Absolute space foregrounded the body in its direct experience of sociality, and allowed that experience to express numerous ambiguous and contradictory meanings.

With what Lefebvre calls the medieval revolution, characterized by increasing secularism, the Logos of the merchant, and its accompanying shift in representational

²Lefebvre explains absolute space through a meditation on the *mundus* in pre-Modern Rome. The *mundus* was a pit or dumping hole in the middle of the city, both produced and natural, a space which contained many functions and meanings: trash dump, grave for unwanted babies, symbolic passageway connecting the earth to the city, shadow realm, vagina, "earth-as-mother" (242). But then, through a process of interpretation and abstraction, Lefebvre argues that the *mundus* became appropriated by the space of the town to delimit that which it was not, namely, power, commerce, politics, and patriarchy. The *mundus*, an absolute space subsumed within yet demarcated from the political space of the town, whose inferiority was then enforced through representations, was compelled to *mean* in a way which constituted the rest of the city as the site of patriarchal power. (243).

modalities,³ absolute space was commandeered by abstract space. Abstract space is now grounded in the flow of money, goods, services and information – these flows mediate not only public life, but also the most private social relationships. As opposed to an absolute space grounded in “unmediated relationships,” abstract space “erases distinctions,” and is a site where “lived experience is crushed, vanquished by what is ‘conceived of’” (51). Abstract space values only the *representation* of lived experience, and only when that representation allows it to perpetuate itself. In this way, the lived body is perceived most frequently as merely a sign of itself. This is what happens when we describe a person we know as “like” that character on television, the representation standing in for and defining lived experience.⁴

In abstract space, all social relationships are mediated by ideologies. Private ownership of property, urban commercialization, the Logos of calculation, and the circulation of representations which abstract urban space from natural space (and viewer from viewed) all inform the dominant space we continue to inhabit and reproduce today (263-278). A space which refuses the knowledge of the natural world, which carves it up in order to increase the flow of commodities and to retain power, which treats bodies as just such a commodity – this is the space that we currently inhabit. This is a space that erases bodies and inserts in their place *signs* of bodies, distorted, fragmented, idealized. This, of course, as Lefebvre probably doesn’t even

³ Foucault is most helpful here in describing this shift from a philosophy of similitudes to the abstraction of signification, that is, from a (medieval) philosophy where everything in nature is marked by a signature that indicates its nature, to a new period where the “written word and things no longer resemble one another” (*Order* 48). Foucault cites the publication of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* as the moment of rupture between these two modalities of representation.

⁴ As Chuck Klosterman says about the debut reality show *The Real World*, they weren’t just “sampling the youth of America – they were unintentionally creating it” (*Sex* 28).

need to announce, is the space of capitalism: “Capitalism and neocapitalism have produced abstract space, which includes the ‘world of commodities,’ its ‘logic’ and its worldwide strategies, as well as the power of money and that of the political state” (53).

Dominant, capitalist space works hard (although we tend not to see its labor)⁵ to produce a code for legibility. In capitalist space, that code is geared toward making intelligible and knowable that which contributes to the proliferation of the system of capitalism, in other words, the circulation and accumulation of commodities and the private ownership of means of production. Conversely, the parts of lived experience which cannot be explained or made legible by these modes of transmission are rendered either impotent or invisible. And at the very core of that lived experience is the body itself. Therefore the reduction and fragmentation of the body (its actions, its memories, its knowledge, its sensations) and/or its replacement by spectacularized or idealized representations is a result of a space produced by capitalism.

The way that dominant space actually accomplishes this kind of violent representation (or the way that space trains its “users” in what Erwin Panofsky calls the “logic of visualization” (qtd. in Lefebvre 286)) is theorized by Martin Heidegger and, again, if you will bear with me, a little background is necessary. Whereas Lefebvre oriented his materialist argument around the production of space, Heidegger engages a phenomenological critique of vision. In his essay, “The Age of the World Picture,” Heidegger describes a relationship between the rise of the subject (as embraced by the

⁵ See, for example, Matthew Smith’s article in Fuchs’ edited collection *Land/Scape/Theater* comparing Disney World to Wagner’s total theatre, which methodically hides its means of production.

Enlightenment project)⁶ and the emergence of the “world picture,” which “does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture” (*Question* 129). The world grasped as picture is the result of an understanding of representation which makes an object out of (and therefore *fixes*) that which occurs in lived experience. This kind of representing Heidegger refers to as *enframing*: “it is a laying hold and grasping of . . . a going forth – from out of itself – into the sphere . . .” (149). This theory of representation is connected to the humanist notion of man as subject inasmuch as the world as picture/object can only be legible if it is configured in such a way as to ensure man as its center and knowing eye, the arbiter of knowledge and the power which knowledge commands (133).⁷ The relationship between subject and object as a relationship of power enforced through the use of representations is, according to Heidegger, precisely the defining characteristic of the modern technological period, born from man’s need to feel secure and safe in a world which was suddenly shifting and unstable (150-1).

To put it another way, education theorist Paulo Freire, who uses the same argument in his clarion call for pedagogies of liberation, says: “The oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its

⁶ Heidegger suggests that once man could no longer look to the Church for certainty he had to look elsewhere, and so his gaze settled on his own self. This certainty took the form of *reason*, or the “self-liberating man’s guaranteeing for himself the certainty of the knowable” (*Question* 148). Heidegger locates this guarantee squarely within the Cartesian tradition: “What is this something certain that fashions and gives foundation? The *ego cogito (ergo) sum*. The something certain is a principle that declares that, simultaneously (conjointly and lasting an equal length of time) with man’s thinking, man himself is indubitably co-present, which means now is given to himself. Thinking is representing, setting-before, is a representing relation to what is represented . . .” (149).

⁷ But this power also comes with a price: alienation. Performance scholar Una Chaudhuri describes the emergence of perspective in the visual arts: “The visual control provided by the technique [of perspective] was experienced by its first viewers as giving them a kind of supernatural access to the represented world. In fact it did just the opposite: far from bringing the viewer into the world shown in the painting, the success of the illusion depended on keeping him fixed in one position just outside the picture frame, firmly alienated from the landscape” (“*Land*” 19).

domination. The earth, property, production, the creations of people, people themselves, time – everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal” (40). Phenomenologist David Michael Levin echoes this sentiment when he describes “. . . enframing [as] a mode of perception . . . which reduces the horizon to a collection of objects available for total, comprehensive control” (76). The major problem with enframing (Heidegger alternately refers to it as “calculative thinking” (*Discourse 46*)) is the way that it exerts power, the way that it “assembles and orders” (*Question 19*). Enframing situates the “looker” in a position of mastery over that which is looked upon by giving that looker (the illusion of) full knowledge of the object seen. But, as Una Chaudhuri points out in her work on landscape painting, this knowledge/power is just an illusion:

The founding paradox of perspective as employed in landscape painting is that it appears to ‘give’ us the world – especially the natural world, its favorite subject – just at the very moment that it removes it from us – or rather, us from it – most decisively. That we do not notice the loss is not surprising given what we gain: a mechanism for producing the imminently useful conviction that the world can be mastered by the eye. (19)

The practice of enframing, furthermore, reproduces itself ad infinitum. Levin comments that visual experience “willfully *re-presents* whatever presents itself, so that every presence manifesting in the field of vision is essentially reduced to the ontology of a mere thing” (65). Especially with the pervasiveness of technologies like television and film, enframing has developed into a habit with almost all of us, so that we see everything and *everyone* as though they were objects contained in a screen. Somebody who is contained by the gesture of enframing is mastered, measured, stabilized, made known, and made into an object.

I would like to bring Heidegger's theory of enframing and Lefebvre's theory of dominant (capitalist) space into relief by bringing them to bear on the experience and representation of homelessness in an effort to further contextualize zAmya's theater work. First, a social residue is produced when capitalism others those (such as those experiencing homelessness) that cannot be made legible by its metrics (that is, those who are not "productive" members of society). Second, images of homelessness are produced by corporate machines and disseminated through the mass media which fragment and distort, and then re-order, those bodies in a way which cause the rest of "us" to think of "them" in a particular way – diseased, lazy, pitiful, in need of charity, etc. Therefore, capitalism literally produces the conditions which cause a percentage of the population to live in homelessness *and* it also creates representations that alternately contribute to the marginalization of those experiencing homelessness as well as (and paradoxically) the effort to re-assimilate them back into dominant space. The body of the person experiencing homelessness is othered, alienated, fragmented, robbed of any power to represent him or herself, and then re-circulated once that representation has been rendered legible.

Those who do not comply with the codes of legibility of dominant space are "assembled and ordered" by even the most well-meaning social groupings. For example, the Wilder Foundation of St. Paul, MN publishes a regular report on homelessness by attempting to quantify it – they count the homeless, determine their demographic composition, identify opportunities for affordable housing (or rather, the lack thereof), and describe the various populations who are most vulnerable to a lengthy homelessness (Shelton). Scores of statistics are punctuated occasionally by a picture of

or quotation from an “actual” homeless person, as though to prove the report’s veracity. But the report does not probe more deeply to investigate systemic causes of homelessness, to ask, for example, how enduring enculturated racism might contribute to high numbers of African Americans on waiting lists for housing assistance. Another advocacy organization, the National Coalition for the Homeless, suggests that homelessness is engendered by poverty (which is technically accurate), but it doesn’t explore, say, how certain sectors of the population have more access to education, and consequently more diverse opportunities in the workforce (*National*). Additionally, the handy “factsheets” or information organized according to the logic of a soundbyte, for quick consumption, never connect the (presumably privileged) reader to those experiencing homelessness in a continuous social network. A separation is created, like in Chaudhuri’s perspective paintings, an “us” and a “them,” where they are the unfortunate ones and we have the power to help them. However, what that gesture actually accomplishes is to position homelessness as a sort of temporary dumping ground for those people who do not function successfully in a social or economic sense according to the logic of dominant space. Then, conversely, the literature re-presents those experiencing homelessness so that they *appear legible* (as, for example, deserving of sympathy, or bravely confronting adversity, or grateful for life’s small pleasures) to the wider, consuming public, which makes it desirable to try to assimilate them back into society. This information is organized so that the reader may “know” homelessness, which is laid out for view through statistics and data as a concrete object to be grasped. These advocacy organizations attempt to “solve” homelessness by engaging in the very techniques that dominant space uses to marginalize or re-assimilate

those experiencing homelessness in the first place, the techniques described by Heidegger as calculative thinking (presenting only the statistics of homelessness, or the carefully chosen photograph of a mother and her children, for example) or enframing (situating those experiencing homelessness within a frame which makes them legible to the non-homeless).⁸

As I just mentioned, one of the more debilitating aspects of this kind of popular literature on homelessness is that it rarely connects the phenomenon of homelessness to that of “housedness,” for the two are in fact intricately interrelated. Homeownership in United States society is heavily mythologized and naturalized by dominant space. As a part of the American Dream, the social pressure to own dates at least as far back as the New Deal legislation in the 1930s, in which federal assistance was granted to homeowners as a way of stabilizing the economy (Radford 202). This practice was recently echoed by the current administration’s Worker, Homeownership, and Business Assistance Act of 2009, which allotted an \$8000 tax credit to first-time home buyers, proving that this mythology is still alive and well. The practice normalizes homeownership, “incentivizing” the public into buying. As sociologist Marco D’Eramo comments:

The privately owned home is literally *salvific*, and it has long been the state’s task to guide each American along the path of righteousness toward salvation. This means enacting laws that make it more convenient to buy than to rent. For this reason, the American fiscal system constitutes one enormous incentive to purchase a home: rent payments aren’t tax deductible, whereas mortgage payments are . . . *Such fiscal exemptions of mortgage payments cost the federal government each year more than its annual spending on housing subsidies.* (128 emphasis added)

⁸ Dwight Conquergood makes a related claim in response to his encounters with Hmong refugees in Thailand: “Refugee subjects are discursively represented [by aid workers] in a way that reduces them to the unhealthy and/or passive Other who is to be managed, administered, and if need be, changed” (“Health” 198).

Social policy theorist Gerald Daly's research reaches this same conclusion, and he adds: "Those with the highest incomes and most expensive houses receive the greatest benefits" (43). Homeownership does not only *mark* the relationship between the economically viable and the poor, it also continually *produces* it. As these two scholars point out, the funds which *could* help those who really need housing assistance (such as the working poor) are actually awarded to those homeowners who are already financially successful, who can afford to buy the most expensive homes. In this way, the housed, through direct government intervention, are producing the homeless and the nomadic, such as renters who must frequently move out of apartments that become increasingly too expensive due to gentrification. But this is never discussed in the popular literature, such as advocacy websites, the material that most people who are interested to learn about homelessness might peruse. Why? I think it is because it implicates those very readers in the problem. And the advocacy websites need those well-meaning individuals to contribute their money and other resources to helping house the homeless – it surely wouldn't do to make them feel guilty. Therefore, the homeless are presented as a heart-wrenching statistic, their bodies and experiences are enframed, *marketed*, in such a way as to produce the most revenue.

My point here is not to indict advocates, but to indict the system of relational practices which dominant space sets up and which advocacy works within. Speaking from my own middle-class position, I can attest to the feeling of anxiety produced by not owning a home yet, as though I have transgressed some cultural expectation which requires me to "graduate" into homeownership. I believe this anxiety contributes to the

stigmatization of homelessness. As my dissertation advisor Sonja Kuflinec remarked, in this country we say “the *homeless*,” implying a lack – why not use a term like *nomad*, she suggests, one that is not so pejorative? I agree with her. The usefulness of the term *homeless* to dominant space is that it works to eliminate obstacles in resistant space, precisely by implying a lack.⁹ Those who are experiencing homelessness pose a threat to dominant space: many function largely outside the constraints of dominant space, by trading in informal economies or by spatializing pedestrian architecture in alternative ways.¹⁰ Engaging in these kinds of alternative activities reveals as constructed the social spaces and mechanisms that dominant space tries to naturalize, such as the “formal” economy or mainstream use of public space. Dominant space cannot *not* respond to these resistances, as David Harvey says: “The socialization and training of labor – the management of human capital – cannot be left to chance. Capital therefore reaches out to dominate the living process – the reproduction of labor power – and it does so because it must” (*Urban* 85). Therefore, “the homeless” are stigmatized and disempowered; their bodies are endlessly shuffled from one service center to another, centers which are inevitably spread out across a vast swath of urban terrain; and their images are rampantly distorted in mass media. And the rest of “us,” who are afraid of becoming “them,” continue to obey the laws of dominant (capitalist) space.¹¹

⁹ Using the term *homeless* as an identity marker resolutely locates the person experiencing it outside of normative spaces. At zAmya and St. Stephen’s, and you may have noticed so far in my writing, we try to use the term *person experiencing homelessness*. It is a small, but resistant, gesture. Although cumbersome, it describes a temporal (and temporary) condition which does not define a person, but rather his or her circumstances.

¹⁰ I first heard the term informal economies in Teresa Gowan’s article “Homeless Recyclers,” and spatializing is Stanton B. Garner’s term for the activity of humanizing space (*Bodied* 179), which I will deal with specifically in chapter two.

¹¹ I use “us” and “we” intentionally here to include myself in a group of privileged individuals who nourish dominant space by engaging in its relational practices. This entire dissertation is, in fact, aimed directly at the “us” I invoke here: it is a gentle plea to transform what Freire calls our oppressor consciousness.

We continue to reproduce that space with our practices of buying and selling by, for example, saying we have the *right* to raise our children in a safe neighborhood without analyzing the cultural mythology which dictates the parameters of safety and the way those parameters exclude certain racially or economically marked bodies. Or we continue to treat bodies as though they were representative objects in a visual field: when a housed person encounters a person experiencing homelessness in a public setting, the former treats the latter according to the logic supplied by dominant space – the housed person, inevitably, averts his or her eyes, or moves away imperceptibly to avoid a perceived contagion, or takes pity and offers a monetary donation. The habitual response reinforces a naturalized separation between the two, a separation created and enforced by dominant space. All these actions are designed to rob peripheral spaces and marginalized bodies of the power they may have to transform the nature of dominant space.

So what is to be done? This question brings me back to the theater, and to the rest of the dissertation. If dominant space has convinced us (all of us) to pursue a lifestyle grounded in the accumulation of objects and money and services and information; if it has trained us to look at others through the mediated lens of these same ideologies, in a way which turns bodies into objects and all instances of social relation into market transactions; then, *what better motivation for an activist theater than to create a space which resists these very gestures by generating relational practices that are other than those which exist in dominant space, by encouraging a kind of looking or encounter that is something other than enframing?*

One way to achieve this kind of theater is by recourse to what I am calling an intimacy of social change. This kind of social change is located in the manner in which someone moves through space, or expresses a feeling, or crafts a story, and I will detail its mechanisms throughout the rest of the dissertation. I have been able to theorize an intimacy of social change due largely to the opportunity I have had to observe how zAmya Theater Project negotiates dominant space. I will now properly introduce zAmya and situate my research within the existing body of scholarship on activist theater, and also cite the kinds of art and critical projects which provide impetus for my inquiry.

Locating zAmya

zAmya Theater Project was founded by Lecia Grossman in Minneapolis in 2004. Lecia began the project because of a feeling: pain. She said that when she saw people who were experiencing homelessness on the street, she felt a terrific grief, and that she had been feeling this way for years without knowing what to do about it. After attending a leadership seminar in which she was compelled to materialize her feelings into action, she began zAmya. “I didn’t want to do something *for* homeless people, I wanted to do something *with* them,” she emphasized to me in one of the first interviews we had. She was put in contact with Maren Ward and Joseph Evans, two Minnesota theater professionals, and together the three spearheaded the first zAmya production, *Act Before Midnight*, a series of vignettes in the vaudeville style based on stories the participants had told about their experience with homelessness. Maren has directed

zAmya's productions ever since, Joe helped shape the scripts until 2008, and several of the actors in that first production are still involved with zAmya today.

zAmya (a Sanskrit word which means "aiming for peace") produces one play each year about homelessness. The rehearsal process begins in the summer with workshops at various organizations that deal in some way with homelessness, such as Salvation Army Harbor Light in downtown Minneapolis. Lecia and Maren will go around the facility inviting residents of this temporary housing shelter to come in to the chapel (where the workshop is being held) and participate in theater exercises to explore their experience of homelessness. Once everyone who wants to participate is assembled, Maren will spend a few hours playing warm-up games, doing image theater, conducting writing exercises, and setting up story-circles to encourage people to investigate their experience with homelessness through the performing arts. zAmya always works with communities in temporary housing facilities such as St. Stephen's Social Services and Salvation Army Harbor Light, but they have also reached out to organizations that are in some way linked to the show's theme: for example, in 2008 the show focused on the foreclosure crisis, so zAmya did a workshop with Edina Realty to investigate how professionals in the housing market were responding to the crisis.

After this material-gathering phase is finished (usually the beginning of October), the show is cast and begins rehearsing. The cast is a mix of those experiencing homelessness and those who are housed, zAmya veterans and people new to the project, professional actors and non-self-identified performers. During rehearsals, the actors and director begin shaping the stories that have been told during workshops into a script, largely through structured improvisation. These improvisations are

recorded on video or transcribed as they are performed in rehearsal, and then the playwright further shapes those stories into the production script. Sometimes the script is an episodic string-of-pearls composed of the stories told in rehearsal. Other times it takes the form of an adaptation, such as the 2007 show, *There's No Place Like Home*, which refigured Dorothy, Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion as people experiencing homelessness on the “trail” to find housing and other kinds of assistance. The rehearsed show is then toured around the Twin Cities to various venues: shelters, churches, government centers, high schools, academic conferences, and theaters have all hosted zAmya during their tour, which is always the week before Thanksgiving, National Hunger and Homelessness Week.

For the first five years of its existence, zAmya’s yearly road show was funded by regional and state grants and private donations.¹² During this time, the Project was administered by an advisory board made up of housed allies, mostly professionals and academics from Minneapolis, as well as several zAmya actors. I was a member of this board for approximately six months in 2009, and continue to serve occasionally in an advisory role to zAmya. After my research period, and as I was finishing writing this dissertation, zAmya dissolved their advisory board and became a program of St. Stephen’s Social Services in Minneapolis, with whom they’ve had a relationship throughout their existence. St. Stephen’s has given zAmya rehearsal and performance space for many of their productions, and several actors have been introduced to zAmya because they were residents at one of St. Stephen’s programs, such as the emergency shelter or the Kateri Residence, which houses Native American women.

¹² The 2007 and 2008 shows were funded by grants issued by the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, COMPAS Community Art Program, and the McKnight Foundation.

St. Stephen's, a non-profit devoted to ending homelessness, is located in the Whittier neighborhood, an ethnically diverse community with a statistically higher percentage of residents living in poverty than the city of Minneapolis at large (City of Minneapolis). Described by journalist Jon Tevlin as a "complex neighborhood" and, especially in the 80s and 90s, a "high crime area," Whittier contains such economically divergent populations as well-to-do tourists visiting the Minneapolis Institute of Art and impoverished drug dealers. St. Stephen's Director of Development Margaret Miles has mentioned that many housed residents dislike the social services available in the neighborhood, and are quite vocal with their opinions. However, if the number of housed actors involved in zAmya's production over the past three years is any testament to the belief that social services are needed and productive in this area (12 or approximately 42% of all zAmya actors in this time period were housed), then there is a powerful dissenting opinion facing those residents. The boundary line (shifting and leaky though it may be) between those who support the work that organizations like zAmya or St. Stephen's do and those that dislike or perhaps even fear them is often the very fodder of zAmya's shows.

Another boundary line at zAmya has to do with race. Lecia, Maren, and Joe are all white and housed, whereas the actors for the most recent production I researched comprise a more heterogeneous group: Larry, Darrel, Big Daddy, and Marvin are African-American men who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness; Ed is a white man who is experiencing homelessness; Esther and Crystal are white women who are housed; Greg is a white man who is housed; Corey is an African-American man who is housed; and Arminta is an African-American woman who is housed. Over

the course of the four productions that I witnessed (2006-2009), all of the actors were either African-American or white with the exception of two participants who were Native American women. While I was with zAmya there were no Asian-American or Latino actors involved in the cast. The lack of Asian-American and Latino actors participating with zAmya may be a result of the fact that only 2 and 7 percent of these ethnicities, respectively, make up the homeless population in Minnesota. The most significant disparity between the general population of Minnesota and the population of those experiencing homelessness is with African-Americans: whereas they make up but 3 percent of the general population of the state, they make up a staggering 38 percent of those experiencing homelessness (Owen 9).¹³

The racial disparities in Minnesota, though, do not begin at the shelter door. To cite just one example, according to the Institute on Race and Poverty at the University of Minnesota, race has much more impact on whether a person seeking a mortgage will receive a subprime loan than income does. This is aggravated by the fact that neighborhoods in the Twin Cities tend to be highly segregated, and neighborhoods of color are “underserved by prime lending institutions and over-served by near-prime and subprime lenders” (Institute 13). With the crash in the housing market, these subprime borrowers were (and continue to be) much more likely to default on their home loans and end up at risk of becoming homeless (4). In this way, an enculturated racism outside the shelter door leads to higher numbers of people of color, particularly African-Americans, within the system of homelessness and hence, within zAmya’s casts. As I mention throughout the dissertation, however, zAmya actors, many of whom are

¹³ These are 2006 numbers from the Wilder Report on Homelessness in Minnesota. The 2000 Census lists the following figures for Minnesota: 4.6% Black, 4.1% Hispanic, and 3.5% Asian (U.S. Census).

African-American and/or have experienced homelessness, have a lot of power in the rehearsal space, both through the collaborative process and, increasingly, as facilitators of workshops and other theatrical and pedagogical events. Part of this power comes from speaking and uncovering the injustices they face in other social spaces.

Ultimately, according to Margaret Miles, attitudes toward homelessness in Minneapolis tend to be representative of national attitudes, which in any urban center will contain many divergent opinions. These opinions range from the kind of accountability and compassion one anonymous audience member expressed when he or she referred to the need to respect and help “our” homeless people (Harrison), to what San Francisco attorney Martha Bridegam has called a “‘hate campaign’ against the city's poor” (Gonzalez). Therefore this urban area, like most, contains contradictory attitudes toward those experiencing homelessness, attitudes which zAmya turns toward, reveals, and excavates in their theatrical productions.

My intersection with zAmya started in 2007 after I met Maren in a performance and social change class at the University of Minnesota. I quickly followed her to zAmya and by that autumn had ensconced myself as a member of the project, although in exactly what capacity I was to remain unsure for some time (my struggle with what it meant to be an ethnographer of the project is taken up in the chapters that follow). I witnessed a remounting and performance of the 2006 show, *Ten You Win/Ten You Lose*, in the summer of 2007, and the entire rehearsal and performance process for both the 2007 and the 2008 shows. I also saw a performance of the 2009 show, although was not in town for the rehearsal process. I interviewed, both formally and informally, many of the actors and several audience members. I refer to the actors and other

members of the creative team by their given names or a nickname they have chosen to comply with their wishes as set forth in the consent form I asked them to sign in cooperation with IRB guidelines. Although audience members are vital to community-based theater, they are somewhat peripheral to this study – I refer to audience members and others I encountered who were not asked to sign consent forms by pseudonyms or by demographic markers to preserve their anonymity.

It was originally my intention to be much more dialogic as I wrote this dissertation, meaning that I wanted to share drafts with members of the project and incorporate their feedback into my final revisions. Due to the constraints of time (both mine and the participants’) and the structuring and language of the dissertation, this has not been possible. Therefore, it is my intention to write this document for a scholarly audience who also makes community-based theater, and then to create an abbreviated document in the near future to share with zAmya. Lecia and I have also had preliminary discussions about starting a blog on zAmya’s website – we want to continue our discussions about community-based theater, its practices, its ethical quandaries, its intent, and many other subjects with not only the other participants at zAmya, but with a wider audience interested in these same issues.

zAmya has affected me perhaps most profoundly because of its contrast to my background in professional theater. As a trained actor and director, my work in the theater so far has been focused on breaking into the field and making the most aesthetically compelling images I could there. zAmya made my thinking *wider*, as it compelled me to wonder about the kinds of relationships that could exist between a theatrical performance and its audiences, and led me to hypothesize that what theater

could do best was not to replicate the kinds of relational patterns found in dominant space, but begin to create new ones, less oppressive or manipulative ones. Community-based theater held particular appeal because of its reluctance to just keep rehashing the same old masterpieces – it stands to reason that creating new work (or re-visioning old work, like doing adaptations) will help the project of creating new relational patterns among theater’s participants. In this respect, zAmya’s focus on authoring new theater of importance to a specific, local community was crucial for me to witness and participate in, and it is my observations of zAmya’s creative process that form the bulk of what I have to offer the field of CBT scholarship.

And that field is a burgeoning one. I have not come across anyone who theorizes community-based theater who does not also practice or teach it, and so I refer to all these writers as scholar-practitioners. The literature on CBT is usually contained within the broader field of community-based performance (CBP) scholarship, which is composed largely of performance documentation and historical cataloguing, with some notable but few examples of theoretical analysis. One of the first people to write about community-based theater in the U.S. was Robert Gard, who practiced and theorized a community theater which responded to local concerns rather than importing hits from Broadway. For today’s scholar-practitioners, Suzanne Lacy’s work on and theorizing of community projects is seminal; her edited volume *Mapping the Terrain* both lays out her own theory of “art in the public interest” and showcases the scholarship of important players in this field, like theater ecologist Suzi Gablik, performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and art critic Lucy Lippard. Jan Cohen-Cruz and Petra Kuppers have written or edited books that are both historical and critical in nature –

although these volumes address community-based theater, they, like most, also write more broadly about performance. Sonja Kuflinec has written specifically about community-based Cornerstone Theater and the performance of national identity, and more recently on her own facilitation work in the Balkans. Susan Chandler Haedicke and Tobin Nelhaus' anthology *Performing Democracy* contains many compelling essays about theater, including Bruce McConachie's influential article "Approaching the 'Structure of Feeling' in Grassroots Theatre," which explores efficacy using Raymond Williams' theories about group bonding. And Eugene van Erven has written several books about radical theater, including *Community Theatre: Global Perspectives*, which seeks to bring visibility to the creative processes of community artists who will "never be nominated for national awards" (ix).

There are a few scholar-practitioners who have written specifically about homelessness theater, an even smaller field within CBT. The two most recognizable companies in this area are Cardboard Citizens, a UK company that does Forum Theater for audiences of those experiencing homelessness, and Los Angeles Poverty Department, a project founded by performance artist John Malpede and dedicated to producing community-based performance with residents of LA's Skid Row. A representative example of the way CBT is often theorized can be found in Frances Babbage's chapter about Cardboard Citizens in her book *Augusto Boal*. Babbage introduces a recurring theme early in her chapter by reassuring her audience that "The company's work [by providing employment opportunities and job training] thus extends far beyond theatre-making" (70). Babbage makes a hierarchy of needs, first shelter and food, *then* theater, and who could argue with her? But why does she feel the need to

legitimate the theater that Cardboard Citizens does with an assurance that they don't *just* do theater work?

Babbage also refers to theater as “a ‘rehearsal for reality’ in which participants can practise and reflect upon possible strategies for change” (71). While I can appreciate the effort to carve out room specifically dedicated to thinking through social justice initiatives, I question the characterization of the rehearsal/performance space as separate from reality, or as a place where social justice cannot in fact occur, but only be imagined. According to Babbage, the theater is *used* to accomplish other, implicitly more important, tasks such as securing employment for those experiencing homelessness. Frankly, I find the presumption that theater can advance these kinds of social justice initiatives to be a strange application of the theatrical apparatus: is getting people jobs or housing really a task that *theater* can accomplish? Does Cardboard Citizens consider itself a failure if its audiences do not find employment? I am reminded of what feminist theater scholar Jill Dolan describes as her “desire to see theatre studies acknowledged and visited . . . rather than raided and discarded” (*Geographies* 65). Although Dolan makes this argument to advocate for a more conscientious exchange of knowledge between performance studies and theater studies, I find it an apt critique in this scenario as well, where the potential value of the theatrical event is subsumed under the need to prove that the company is doing valuable social work, as though these two tasks must inherently be separate.¹⁴ The apologetic

¹⁴ It occurs to me that this attitude might be a symptom of having to appeal to non-arts organizations (such as the government) for funding, where the work's efficacy must be justified in tangible terms in order to win support. But again, this is an example of “advocacy” working within the parameters of dominant space rather than critiquing the relational patterns set forth therein.

tone I find in Babbage's work has inspired me to use my own research to discover what theater *itself* does that could in fact be classified as social change.

In a happy contrast to Babbage, Anthony Jackson writes with vivid attention to the way the performance section of a Cardboard Citizens Forum conveys meaning even before the Joking begins. In "The Dialogic and the Aesthetic: Some Reflections on Theatre as a Learning Medium," Jackson relates the way one of the characters operates as an "audience surrogate," and describes the way that the narrative itself "demand[s] from the audience constant readjustment and refocusing" (115). As opposed to the performance being merely a pretext for the "real" work of social change, Jackson demonstrates a philosophy that remained largely invisible in Babbage's analysis of Cardboard Citizens: that without effectively deployed creative techniques, there is no effective political transformation. In Anthony Jackson's analysis, compelling theater becomes a vital medium for alternative types of social engagement, rather than a bit of entertainment, a sort of ice breaker, before the real work can begin.

The other well-known theater that contends with homelessness, Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD), is addressed in the scholarship of CBT practitioner-scholars such as Robert Leonard, Jan Cohen-Cruz, Linda Frye Burnham, David Graver and Loren Kruger. In Burnham's article, "Hands Across Skid Row," an interview with LAPD founder John Malpede reveals some of the same assumptions held by Babbage: Malpede differentiates the act of making art ("when you write a script or something") from the time "when you create social change, that's something else" (Burnham 9). However, Burnham's scholarship reflects another trend in CBT scholarship: a gallant effort to engage a politics of visibility for the work of homelessness theater, and I agree

that this is a necessary labor for an art form that receives so little public and scholarly attention. What I wish to add to the conversation is a more specific engagement with bodies in space, and with the limits and possibilities of theatrical structure as they pertain to activist intentions. I too am trying to make visible the work of the activist artists at zAmya Theater Project, but I am also interested in critiquing the way these kinds of projects are perceived as efficacious by drawing attention to the bodies of performers and witnesses during rehearsals and performances. A politics of visibility is important, but so is a critique of vision, of the practice of looking.

Along these lines, an article that I admire quite a bit is “Dispossessing the Spectator: Performance, Environment, and Subjectivity in Theatre of the Homeless,” written by David Graver and Loren Kruger. The authors compare “homeless theater” productions by the Living Theater, Antenna Theatre, and LAPD, judging each production’s efficacy in terms of the structures and practices of the play-making, in terms of which metaphors or motivations were more artistically (and henceforth) more politically viable. I appreciate this analysis because it allows the event, the performance, to remain in focus and responsible for accomplishing activism, rather than being just a precursor for other, “more important” actions. In their discussion, which concentrates on spectatorial pleasure, Graver and Kruger claim that LAPD “displays the private person upon the stage but gives this personality such an overwhelming individual autonomy that the public cannot consume it” (168). In what might be construed as a response to performance scholar Baz Kershaw’s argument that theater is no longer a viably radical art form, these authors claim that LAPD “undermine[s] the commodifying impulses of both theater and society and demonstrate[s] the resistant

integrity of individual existence” (169). They go on to theorize the company’s purpose in concrete, active terms: not to *display* homelessness, but to “create their community on stage” (169). Graver and Kruger provide a model of CBT scholarship which I hope to emulate and contribute to.

Beyond the specific publications I have mentioned, community-based theater scholarship at large also maintains, as is perhaps fitting, a somewhat nomadic and marginal survival: this additional body of work tends to exist virtually and in embodied encounters more often than in the canonical world of textual authorship. For example, Lynda Frye Burnham and Steve Durland maintain the Community Arts Network, a web clearinghouse for stories and scholarship about community-based performance, with an emphasis on practice and pedagogy. *The Citizen Artist* is one such example, an online book anthologizing twenty years of articles from the performance art/community-based art journal *High Performance*. Although also available in hard copy format, its online existence exemplifies an ethos of access and exchange prevalent in community-based projects. Also, frequent conferences, often promoted by university programs or activist performance networks such as Alternate ROOTS or Pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed, bring scholars and practitioners together to share critique and techniques. Finally, performances themselves become the sites of embodied scholarship inasmuch as the process of creating and watching community-based theater is (should be) a critical investigation into social injustice and its potential remedies.

Community-based theater may also be considered from the perspective of its lineage within a genealogy of twentieth century United States alternative theaters, and there are a number of volumes (some recently updated) that chart its movement. For

example, Theodore Shank and Karen Malpede Taylor have compiled compendia of the creative processes and philosophical motivations of radical companies who produce work that, as Taylor describes it, “has no relationship to what we mean by a ‘successful’ work of art” (xii). Taylor’s coverage especially, as she terms her area of inquiry the “people’s theatre,” overlaps the fields of activist theater and alternative theater and, significantly, questions the separation between politics and aesthetics (2). And Arthur Sainer’s *The New Radical Theatre Notebook* locates the emergence of Western radical theater in the Living Theater’s production *The Connection* in 1959, where there was, he says, “some radical loosening of the fabric of drama” (9).

The “loosening” of drama in CBT is often helped along by the fact that this work is usually devised, that is, created in response to a stimulus other than a pre-written dramatic text. Performances can be devised around a piece of visual art, a newspaper headline, someone’s dream, a theme, or countless other points of departure. The history of devising and compendia of its techniques as it is practiced in the West (largely in Great Britain and the United States) have been catalogued by various authors (Oddey; Govan, Nicholson, and Normington; Heddon and Milling; Johnston; Kerrigan), and more books are being published all the time. Devising does not inherently have an activist agenda, but theater director Michael Rohd has developed an important style of devising which actively involves the audience in order to create civically-engaged theater with his Portland-based company Sojourn Theater. And perhaps one of the most influential figures in civically-engaged devising is Liz Lerman, a practitioner-scholar who works with various populations to create community-based dances – her

forthcoming text, *Hiking the Horizontal*, details her theory of populist performance creation as a model for creating more equitable social groupings.¹⁵

Finally, activist theater (including much community-based theater) and its scholarship have been profoundly shaped by the late Brazilian theater artist and scholar Augusto Boal. Theater of the Oppressed, Boal's designation for political theater composed of various "branches," such as Newspaper Theater and Legislative Theater, aims to bring freedom to humanity by encouraging audiences to use theater to name and resist social and political oppressions.¹⁶ A classic example is Forum Theater, where a play is presented whose narrative contains a social injustice, after which the audience is invited to perform possible solutions to the problem the play brings up. Theoretically, these solutions could then be carried out in "real life." Boal claims that political theater should be a "rehearsal for the revolution," and as I pointed out in Babbage's scholarship and Malpede's practice, I find that his thinking has so thoroughly pervaded the ensuing community-based theater scholarship that the performance of the play itself has come to be perceived as something of a precursor, a way of drawing audiences in before the "real work" of battling injustice begins. Theatrical labor itself, such as writing, rehearsing, and watching the plays, is differentiated from the project's activism: it is rarely considered to be the site of political action or even personal transformation. My own work contests the separation between theater and "real life" by claiming that theater occurs *in* real life, that theater contains a materiality and a politics that require

¹⁵ I heard Lerman discuss her new book in a keynote speech at the South Eastern Theatre Conference in March 2010.

¹⁶ See Boal: *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, *Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to Make Politics*, and *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

critical attention, and that theater is a space where transformation (through poetic means) is possible.

Theoretical Frames, Research Methodology, and Critical Models

In the following chapters, I trace journeys through intimate, local geographies: the movement of my body as ethnographer from field to write-up; the movement of the actors' bodies as they rehearse and perform; the movement of the facilitator's body as she organizes the actors' work; and the movement of the audiences' bodies in response to the performance. Central to all this stirring about is the primacy of looking, and the belief that the way in which we behold each other can either empower or dispossess. In this section I will review the theories, methodologies, and critical models which have given structure to my negotiation of zAmya's spaces.

I choose to encounter zAmya in my writing primarily through the philosophy of phenomenology. Phenomenology is the study of how phenomena appear to consciousness in direct experience. It puts us on the lookout, as Bruce Wilshire might say, for the obvious which has been hidden from sight by our habits of seeing. I take many cues from Bert States (including this reference to Wilshire), who writes evocatively about phenomenology and performance in "The Phenomenological Attitude" and *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, and also from Stanton B. Garner's book about the phenomenology of drama, *Bodied Spaces*. I choose phenomenology as a theoretical lens because it draws attention to the very ground of the theatrical event, the lived and perceiving body – the subtle or explicit ways in which the body acquires and retains power, the actions it takes to resist dominant forces, or the ways in which it

exists as a site upon which power is played out are all operations which can become visible through a phenomenological analysis. In this sense, phenomenology also pairs nicely with other analyses of the body, such as a materialist analysis: far from dehistoricizing the body situated within such an analysis, phenomenology simply contributes, as Donna Haraway says, “the view from a body” (“Situated” 589). There is no reason that phenomenology should not be concerned with politics or economic flows – it is just concerned with those phenomena on a micro-level, from inside lived experience.

To a certain extent, I also employ a semiotic analysis of zAmya’s rehearsals and productions, although it is a complicated one. Semiotics demands that we “read” the performance as if it were a text, and when we are considering the way sign systems can serve to legitimate or interrupt operations of power, or force bodies into acquiescence, then it proves to be a useful method of framing theater. Chapter four employs a semiotic analysis most consciously, where Roland Barthes’ notion of mythology is used to examine the act of narrativizing at zAmya. However, the act of reading a text inherently separates the event of reading into a reader and that which is read, and I would like to argue that thinking of bodies onstage *only* as texts runs the risk of damaging those bodies, of reducing them, alienating them, categorizing them, and making them subject to a particular set of rules (the rules which govern sign systems) which they do in fact, as bodies, exceed. Because I don’t want to (only) *read* the performance, and because I understand the theatrical event not as something which should re-inscribe the separation between two entities (one with the power to interpret and the other which exists only to be observed), but as a fluid and shifting encounter

between actor and witness (both of whom have the power to “look” at each other), then I turn also to phenomenology, which brings attention to that lived intersubjective encounter. In fact, Bert States suggests employing *binocular vision* to look at performance, where one eye sees semiotically and the other sees phenomenologically (*Great 8*). Binocular vision, as Garner picks up on, turns the visual field into the habitational field, and gives the theorist the opportunity to excavate the embodiedness of signs and signification (*Bodied 45*). Coupled with semiotics, phenomenology can serve to alleviate some of the violence done to the actor’s body when it is bypassed in the visual field in favor of what it might mean.

Phenomenological analysis holds a special place for the observing body because of its focus on the way phenomena present themselves to consciousness. I interpret this in my work as an opportunity to be especially self-reflexive as I see, or behold, zAmya’s participants. Phenomenologist David Michael Levin theorizes a kind of seeing which is done with the whole body, not the eyes alone. Seeing, he argues, can be a gesture which draws the looker in to what is being looked at: it makes relationality visible and implicates the seer into what s/he sees (238-240). This kind of seeing helps me stay connected to the people I study, rather than assuming a falsely objective birds-eye view of zAmya’s events. To “see” phenomenologically means to see oneself in the picture as well.

A special attention to reflexivity is also paramount in my research methodology: rehearsal ethnography. Gay McAuley, in her article “Towards an Ethnography of Rehearsal,” delves into the ethics of documentation and the responsibilities of the ethnographer as interpreter. She makes the point that even video-recording takes a

position, that it is not neutral, and that as ethnographers we need to be cautious about how we represent the event in our write-ups, or in the way we use media of the event when we share our research. I hope to add to the work McAuley has begun. My ethnography seeks to combat representational violence by showing how bodies onstage make meaning in ways other than the semiotic, or rather, that bodies on stage *mean* but they also *are*. Bert States says, “. . . though a bird in the feeder may be a sign of spring, it is not the sign of a bird” (“Phenomenological” 375). I’m interested in the birds. This means that as I sit in rehearsal, I pay attention to the actors, the audiences, the writers, and the directors, to their bodies (my body too), their movements, their interactions, what they say and when they stay silent, how they wield power and who makes decisions, when negotiations happen and when compromises do, and what marks those maneuvers make upon bodies and behaviors. As I participate in zAmya’s process and later write up the results of my observations, I am guided by lessons gleaned from contemporary ethnographers on: vulnerability and personal witnessing in the writing project (Behar 20), retaining the radical openness of lived experience in the write-up (Denning, *Performances* 17; Pollock, “Beyond” 643), non-objectifying witnessing (Conquergood, “Performance Studies” 149; Fabian 223), and understanding the “repertoire of embodied practice” as a legitimate source of knowledge (Taylor 26). A reflexive ethnographic practice requires the participant/writer to assess not only the veracity of her claims, but the ethics of the methodology used to reach those conclusions.

Finally, because I am interested in theorizing a theater that resists the relational patterns which exist in dominant space, I have looked at other models of organized

social space which might help structure a resistant theater practice. If theater doesn't just have to be a space of commercial transaction, where one party buys and consumes an evening of entertainment supplied by another party, what other kinds of spaces can it model itself after? I find inspiration from Teresa Gowan's ethnographic work on homelessness, Suzi Gablik's retheorizing of performance in the postmodern age, and J.K. Gibson-Graham and Massimo De Angelis' articulation of the commons.

The first inspiration is Teresa Gowan's work in "Excavating Globalization from Street Level: Homeless Men Recycle Their Pasts." Gowan's ethnographic research on homeless recyclers in San Francisco, as opposed to the few quoted sentences or carefully staged picture of a person experiencing homelessness included on advocacy websites, is infused and structured by the lives of the people she interviews. Rather than being made into an object, the people experiencing homelessness become the authorities cited by, and the propelling reason behind, her writing. By foregrounding people experiencing homelessness as experts on their own lives, Gowan is taking a resistant stance against what dominant space is trying to do to those bodies: categorize them, measure them, or even erase them completely – in other words, make an "it" out of a "he or she." Those experiencing homelessness are not positioned as a problem to be solved (Gowan calls it the disease model), but as humans with agency who are *part of* and affected by the movements of society. Gowan's work provides an alternative to ethnography which objectifies the study participants, "mining" them as fields of information rather than treating them as co-creators of the work.

The second inspiration is artist and critic Suzi Gablik, who suggests that what may have begun as a useful analytical tool – deconstruction – has since become a

system based on “a policy of going nowhere, of not occupying a position, of hovering in place, having no positive horizons, no goals, no constructive alternatives” (40). Rather than succumbing to the nihilism engendered by this disenchantment or creating “rear-guard” art – that is, “feeding the culture only that which is worthless” as an act of resistance – Gablik proposes an alternative, participatory model: “Whereas the aesthetic perspective oriented us to the making of objects, the *ecological perspective* connects art to its integrative role in the larger whole and the web of relationships in which art exists” (18, 7 emphasis added). She advocates with urgency for an art that creates enchantment, ecstasy, and empathy, rather than calculation or alienation, and she locates the potential for this kind of creation squarely within embodied, collaborative experience. The possibility for art to create hope, and the belief that hope is not naïve but radical and resistant, is also embraced at zAmya, and something I use to guide my own work in relation to them.

The third inspiration is J. K. Gibson-Graham, who posit an alternative to capitalist economics by recourse to the notion of a community economy, or commons, an example of which is the worker-owned cooperative Mondragón in the Basque region of Spain. What is resistant about Mondragón’s business model is the way it disburses surplus profits “to the community of cooperators while at the same time contributing to individual wealth through the payment of interest on personal accounts” (125). The practice of simultaneously enriching both community and individuals out of a commonly created fund is something that I think zAmya strives to do as well. The fund that is created in civically-engaged theater is not composed of money or other material resources, though; the fund created in theater is the performance. It is what time and

labor and imagination are dedicated to, it is whose management is negotiated among the participants, and it is what is finally exchanged with the audience. A successful civically-engaged performance, as a “profit” produced by making theater, will nurture both its audiences and the actors who initiated its creation.

Critical political economist Massimo De Angelis defines the commons as a “non-commodified means to fulfill social needs” (“Reflections” 1). He writes: “The ‘outside’ created by struggles is an outside that emerges from within, a social space created by virtue of creating relational patterns that are other than and incompatible with the relational practices of capital” (“Enclosures” 3). I have already mentioned that I am inspired by De Angelis’ attention to relational *practice*. To go back and include Lefebvre and Heidegger’s terminology as well, I would like to suggest that a commons attempting to transform dominant space creates shifting intersubjective encounters, inherently relational and perhaps even purposefully *relativist*, rather than the objectifying and homogenizing experience of enframing.¹⁷

De Angelis also writes: “*Our* outside is a process of *becoming other than capital* . . .” (4). I interpret this to mean that in the commons the body can no longer be thought of or treated as an object (as it is through the process of enframing) or a commodity (as it is in capitalist space). If the theater could become just such a commons, if it could apply an ecological or relational perspective to the collaborative process, and if it could

¹⁷ Similarly, ecologist Bill Devall contrasts two images designed to galvanize the environmentalist movement(s): one is a satellite picture of the earth from space, and the other is the slogan “think like a mountain.” The first engenders a radical distance and “mechanistic worldview” while the second engages the principle of relationality by explaining Arne Naess’ theory that: “. . . the smaller we come to feel ourselves compared to the mountain, the nearer we come to participating in its greatness” (Devall 22).

make events which do not display the problems with community on its stages so much as enact or *become* community (as Kruger and Graver point out in the work of LAPD), then I think it could rightly be classified as efficacious theater for social change.

Introduction to the Chapters

Employing the phenomenological attitude to reflect on the experiences I had as ethnographer in zAmya's rehearsal and performance spaces, in each of the next three chapters I consider one site within the theatrical process. These sites are: 1) spatializing gestures, 2) affective circuits, and 3) narrative acts, and they describe three necessary components (moving through space, feeling, and telling stories) in any theatrical event. I will argue that when an alternative or resistant relational pattern (becoming other than capital, as De Angelis says) arises in any of these three sites, an instance of efficacy has occurred. In the final chapter of the dissertation, I will gather the strands from each of the three body chapters preceding it to formulate a definition for an intimacy of social change, a way of making theater predicated on creating the conditions for compassionate and equitable relationships between its participants.

Spatializing

The explorations in chapter two are inspired directly by Stanton B. Garner's work on the phenomenology of drama. If dominant space traffics in representations, that is, in fractured and fixed images which serve the powerful while oppressing and distorting the disadvantaged and robbing them of the ability to represent themselves, then one way for theater (and scholarship) to subvert dominant space is to refuse to deal

in representations at all, to deny the form. So, rather than thinking of the theater as a representational space (as a field of signs that can be read for, or ordered into, stable meaning), I choose to think of it as a shifting and produced and generative *arena for encounter*. In this way the body is perceived not as a sign to be read (and therefore mastered) but as an agentic being, as a subject who affects and is affected by worlds. Using phenomenology in this chapter carries with it an explicitly activist agenda: I am trying to figure a way out of oppressing with my gaze; I am searching for ways to *look* without enframing.

One way to do this is to adopt Garner's strategy for defamiliarizing dominant attitudes toward the body. It emerges when he proposes to trace a body's "spatializing gestures," that is, "the subject's ability to extend itself within the space it inhabits and thereby humanize this space according to its presence" (179). A body that cannot extend itself in this way, he argues, is a body that is traumatized or oppressed. Using this phenomenological strategy, I am not looking for a character's history or identity to be *represented* onstage, but rather *inscribed*, imprinted in the most literal sense, upon the body's actions. Meaning here occurs not through the sanctioned medium of the image or text, but in alternative formats, in relational patterns to human and non-human worlds, in movement, in stillness, in the way a body takes up space or dances through social formations. More than anywhere else, I am really asking here: what is the body *doing* in response to forces of oppression?

In this chapter I will spend some time reflecting on the way that observing spatializing gestures serves to reveal the politics of the production process: do the collaborative rehearsal techniques actually produce a commons populated by liberated

bodies (as they are intended to), or are participants in some ways prevented from spatializing, from humanizing space according to their own presence? My primary labor in this chapter, though, will be to use Garner's strategy to excavate deep meanings in the pseudo-imaginary world of zAmya's performances. How do the characters in zAmya's performances move through dramatic space, humanizing it or being prevented from doing so? How are audiences invited, by contagion or seduction, to participate in either liberatory or oppressive actions (or some mixture of the two)? It is in these invitations that I see the most potential for resistance, when participants (actors and audiences) might engage in relational practices that, as De Angelis suggests, are incompatible with capital and its numbing flows.

Affect

Chapter three constitutes a response to what Lefebvre calls the "victory of the Logos," and the ensuing dominance of the written word over social existence, which is evident in the architectonics of dominant space today (291, 286).¹⁸ Logos sheds light, forcing whatever it likes to be revealed and hence intelligible, but only within a certain rationality, that of Logos itself (259-262). Being with zAmya has convinced me that this rationality also obliterates the kind of knowledge associated with *affect and emotion*, or more specifically, it obliterates the ability of non-sanctioned affects to flow

¹⁸"In the course of the process whereby the visual gains the upper hand over the other senses, all impressions derived from taste, smell, touch and even hearing first lose their clarity, then fade away altogether, leaving the field to line, colour and light. In this way a part of the object and what it offers comes to be taken for the whole. This aberration, which is normal – or at least normalized – finds its justification in the social importance of the written word. Finally, by assimilation, or perhaps by simulation, all of social life becomes the mere decipherment of messages by the eyes, the mere reading of texts" (Lefebvre 286).

freely and shape outcomes.¹⁹ What do I mean by sanctioned affects? Those feelings which contribute to the health of the socio-political capitalist machine, such as the ideological ‘feeling good after putting in a hard day’s work’. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild refers to having feelings such as these that perpetuate ideologies as “emotion work” (“Emotion” 552). I argue in this chapter that the theater space succeeds in resisting dominant space when it permits the expression and flow of non-sanctioned affects, when its participants refuse to engage in emotion work, or refuse to feel the way they are “supposed” to feel.

One example of emotion work is what zAmya actor Larry Brown referred to as “feeling lost out there” while he was experiencing homelessness. Might this feeling be engineered specifically by a dominant space which seeks to reabsorb those who try to function outside its borders? The feeling of being lost is like a beckoning, calling the disenfranchised back into the fold to become “productive” members of society again. “Feeling lost” convinces those experiencing homelessness that operating outside of the boundaries of dominant space is dangerous, impossible even. Service organizations want to rescue the homeless and relieve their feeling of being lost. If zAmya can, instead, create a space to *linger* with feelings like this, to excavate them through story and image and sound, not to flagellate those who’ve experienced homelessness, but to peer behind those feelings to see what else they might be hiding, then I think it provides a useful critical space.

This chapter explores the way zAmya does some of that excavation at the site of affect, and suggests ways in which it could further the practice of producing alternative,

¹⁹ I first started thinking about this in 2006 when my professor Aleks Wolska asked something like: What part of our life, really, remains unaffected by feelings? And why do we never speak of them?

resistant affective and emotional relationships within the theater space. Art critic and scholar Simon O’Sullivan describes affect as inherently relational: it is “that which connects us to the world. It is the matter in us responding and resonating with the matter around us” (“Aesthetics” 128). The flow of affect is a special site for resistance because it operates outside of the image/text-centered realm which gives dominant space its legibility. As O’Sullivan says, “Indeed, you cannot read affects, you can only experience them” (126). Giving focus to affective responses can reveal the ways in which bodies connect with human and non-human communities, revealing opportunities for resistant activity like coalition-building. Because they are difficult to make legible, however, affects are also a dangerous tool that dominant space can use to enforce ideologies and colonize imaginations. My argument, therefore, is not that affect itself is inherently resistant; rather, it is that training our attention on our own affects, really experiencing our own affective triggers and emotional responses to events and people in a present and meditative way rather than habitually assigning them to categories pre-ordained by dominant space (which often involves ignoring them completely), and taking them seriously as legitimate sources of knowledge, sheds light in a way that the Logos of rationality derides. My focus on affect, then, is part of my on-going advocacy for an art form that lets us listen to and with our bodies, allowing them to *presence* in the company of others.

Narrativizing

Kathleen Stewart builds her ethnographies around the tactics of narrativizing she observes in the communities which populate her writing, tactics of negotiating the

“real” through representations and behaviors which pull together and draw upon a “dense sociality” (*Space* 30-31). I am especially interested in two assertions that she makes about narrativity. One, that “the authority to narrate comes of having been somehow marked by events, in mind if not in body” (32). And two, that “an encompassed and contested way of life . . . might be scripted right into the matter of things” (20). The act of narrativizing at zAmya is decidedly marked by the experience its participants have had with homelessness, and chapter four argues that the work is most efficacious when those participants structure the performance according to their own logics and desires, rather than having those stories shaped for them by other storytellers. As opposed to how, say, non-profit organizations quote a few lines on a website from a homeless person to legitimate their advocacy efforts, the narratives and their narrators are never tokenized at zAmya: these narratives are foregrounded and honored, as they inform the very ground of the theatrical process.

However, even when the participants are telling their own stories, the narrativizing itself is also often colonized by dominant space: that is, dominant space is, as Stewart says, scripted into matter and behavior. This constitutes zAmya as what Dwight Conquergood would call a “leaky space” (“Performance” 145), possessing what Doreen Massey describes as the “porous boundaries” of a social space (*Space* 121). So in this chapter I also borrow Roland Barthes’ notion of mythologies to examine in what ways the narratives told embody and perpetuate dominant ideologies, to note how the “outside” leaks in to and shapes the storytelling.

Although it seems natural to discuss texts in a chapter on narrativizing (and I will do some of that), I am more interested in the way the story is created at the level of

the body. This results in a discussion of techniques of embodied narrativity, of choosing and ordering events for inclusion, in debates about subject matter and the relational practices which these debates engender or rely on. Because zAmya operates in a collaborative manner, I'm interested in how the creation of a story is negotiated across the group. What sorts of compromises are made, and who seems to have authority? When do ideologies prevail, and when are they unearthed and put to question (and by whom)? What sorts of pedagogies seem to enable the most resistant narratives and narrativizing practices? What do these stories *do* to or require of an audience? I ask all these questions phenomenologically, from the point of view of lived experience. This is certainly not to discount the way systemic injustices shape the lives of many of zAmya's participants (both homeless and housed), but to locate the effect of those injustices, and in fact the potential for resistance to them, in the way someone crafts a story, and in the network of meanings and effects that emanate outward, web-like, from that event.

Finally, this discussion allows me the opportunity to reflect on the way I am myself narrativizing zAmya. How do I locate myself in relation to the event? What does my writing *do* to the participants of workshops and performances? How can I, as Johannes Fabian suggests, avoid making an object out of the object of my study?

Intimacy

In my concluding chapter, I draw out moments of efficacy at the sites described in the three preceding chapters (spatializing, affect, and narrativizing) to build a definition for an intimacy of social change in the theater. What differentiates this

theory of social change from, say, Boal's Legislative Theater, is the attention it brings to interpersonal relationships, to the sorts of transformations that can occur, on the spot, during the theatrical event. Intimacy, in this chapter, is derived from Buddhist philosophy. As Mark Nunberg, guiding teacher at Common Ground Meditation Center in Minneapolis, suggests, the goal of meditation is to practice non-attachment, that is, to be "intimate with life without grasping it" ("Understanding"). Nunberg offered this mantra repeatedly during the dhamma (in Pali, or dharma in Sanskrit) talks I attended at the Common Ground center from 2005 to 2007, and as I struggled during that time (and since) to embrace this state of intimacy in my own sitting practice, I had a moment of clarity: what if this kind of intimacy, this closeness without grasping, without wanting to conquer, were something the theater event could cultivate as well? Would practicing intimacy, a radical *presencing*, subvert the kinds of relational practices produced by dominant space? This dissertation is my response, ongoing and unfinished, to that question.

Although the experience of live theater doesn't necessarily guarantee a resistant space, it can provide the conditions for its possibility because it creates an arena for embodied dialogue about what it means to exist in society together. Even the most traditional canonical play engages this dialogue to some degree in its content: *King Lear* critiques the destructive effects of absolute power; *A Doll's House* reveals the insidiousness of gender oppression. However, most productions of these plays continue to be performed in architectures fashioned by dominant space, such as proscenium theaters, that divide theater participants into groups of active and passive members and

thereby create the conditions for enframing to occur. Therefore, I would like to propose that theater becomes (potentially) resistant only when it goes beyond *representing* different ways of being together to giving its participants the opportunity to *enact* different ways of being together. It is important to think about resistance not as something contained only within the narrative line of the story being told, but in the whole social and material world created by the theatrical event. As theater makers, let us begin to ask ourselves, as De Angelis might suggest, what are the relational practices set up by this event? What does the space ask bodies to *do*? I believe that it is here, and not in content or rhetoric, that the real potential for resistance lies. When theater goes from being an optic experience to being a haptic experience, resistance can be revealed in practices, gestures, performances, encounters: in short, the actions of the (social and biological) body.

Chapter Two Spatializing Gestures

Dismantling Representation in Community-Based Theater

In chapter one I discussed dominant space as characterized by a pathological visibility produced and enforced by capitalism. I also described various tactics of resistance to the relational practices engendered by capitalism, such as Gibson-Graham's commons or Suzi Gablik's ecological perspective. This chapter explores the first of three sites in which alternative relational patterns may emerge, and it is described by drama theorist and phenomenologist Stanton B. Garner as "*spatializing gestures*:" spatializing, in this specialized sense, is the "subject's ability to extend itself within the space it inhabits and thereby humanize the space according to its presence" (179). Conversely, states Garner, a body which is oppressed or imprisoned is marked by its inability to spatialize, to extend into and humanize the space around itself: an oppressed body may move, but it does not spatialize. The quintessential image of this kind of oppressed body as it relates to zAmya's work is the individual experiencing homelessness who involuntarily roams the city in search of food or temporary shelter, but who is granted no agency to shape or mark the spaces he or she moves through. In the first half of this chapter, I will lay out the theoretical devices I will use to frame zAmya's spatializing gestures. Then, in the second half, I will put those devices into action as I excavate my experiences with zAmya's 2008 roadshow, *There's No Place Like Home*, to look for ways in which the production process invites the body to resist oppression in the theater space by spatializing the architecture of the script and the contours of the audience.

I would like to start, perhaps paradoxically, by discussing representation, especially the problems that thinking about theater as a representational modality presents to a practice of resistance in civically-engaged theater. In chapter one I cited David Michael Levin, who describes Heidegger's notion of enframing as a sort of viral re-presentation. Levin suggests that the way our vision has been trained by dominant space forces us to reduce everything we see, even people, to the status of object. What implication does Levin's proposition have for the live theater event? It is commonly assumed that the theater space, really, any art work, is an event predicated upon representations, that is, upon a field of signs which produces an intricate play of symbolic meanings. In this understanding, the actors do not play themselves, or *are* not themselves, instead they represent characters created by a playwright and framed in a particular way by the conventions of the production. The scenery is not really Yonkers or Hell, it represents those places, points toward them, albeit with a certain amount of creative license. Depending upon the production, those of us in the audience either delight in the obvious distance between represented characters or spaces and reality, or we temporarily allow ourselves to believe that representations actually are what they say they are. We are used to suspending our disbelief in the theater space: we play at pretend games, and we often appreciate how this activity helps us cultivate our own imaginative potential. The theater would in fact be a very dull place without its use of symbols, metaphors, metonyms, and poetic transmutations of all kinds.

However, there is some danger in ignoring what is *actually* there on stage. This issue comes up in debates over “blind” casting,²⁰ or when we invoke Brecht’s deployment of the Russian Formalist notion of defamiliarization (an idea I’ll return to shortly). But the root of the problem is articulated in Levin’s proposition about representation: especially as a result of the dominance of visual media in our culture, those of us in the audience have become habituated to seeing the actors on stage as “mere things,” as objects who can’t respond to us (as they do not when we watch them on television or in the movies), and to whom we in the audience do not owe a response.²¹ It is not merely that the actors are not playing themselves, it is that as an audience we stop perceiving them as unpredictable and agentive human beings. In a gesture of enframing, we stabilize them, objectify them, within the world of the play. Enframing creates a radical divide between actor and spectator, between those who supply the performance and those who consume the performance. When actors become just “things” who stand in for other “things” – that is, when the nature of the theater space is perceived to be primarily representational – the live body of the actor runs the risk of disappearing.

Community-based theater, which makes plays based upon the life-events and concerns of the participants in the theatrical experience, tries to address the problem with representation by bridging the distance between performer and spectator, and between performer and character. Robert Gard, an early theorist of what is now called CBT, made and promoted grassroots theater in the 1950s in the Midwest. Gard

²⁰ Blind casting, or non-traditional casting, describes the practice of casting an actor in a role who is a different ethnicity or gender than that which is called for in the script.

²¹ Levin cites Heidegger on this issue: “. . . this process of objectification – this enframing – is particularly prevalent in the modern world, where visual experience and its extensions have been dominant” (65).

challenged the common practice of importing Broadway hits to local community theaters, wondering: what did Broadway have to say to rural America? Why not make art that grew from and responded directly to the local people who produced and witnessed it instead? He said, “I was always looking for ways to interest people in the lore and tradition of a region and ways to make the lore live and become an active part of regional life . . .” (*Grassroots* 161). Gard advocated for a theater that involved and revolved around the local community producing it, and was not “merely the perfected dream of artists” (*Community* 6-7).

Many contemporary community-based companies still pursue this same goal, by drawing on the stories of local communities to craft plays, dances, or other kinds of live performances, and/or by casting performers who do not represent imagined or imported characters, but who are rather telling their own stories on stage for an audience of their own cultural, racial, or generational peers. Roadside Theater, based in rural eastern Kentucky, stages plays featuring Appalachian music and stories. The plays are often performed using professional actors, but they also do residencies in local communities, where professional actors are paired with local non-self-identified performers and folk artists. Roadside also frequently collaborates with other CBTs such as Junebug Productions and Pregones Theater. In contrast to Robert Gard’s early focus on rural communities, Pregones Theater casts Puerto Rican actors and patronizes largely Puerto Rican audiences in urban New York City. Their mission is

to create innovative, challenging theater rooted in Puerto Rican traditions and popular artistic expressions, and to present performing artists from different cultures, offering Latinos and other communities an artistic means to affirm and enhance our roles in society. (Cohen-Cruz, “Ecology”)

And Liz Lerman, whose company is currently based in Maryland, has choreographed dances with many communities, including the elderly, genetic scientists, those with disabilities, non-traditional families, coal-miners, and others. Her company's guiding mission question is: "Who gets to dance?" ("Dance Exchange").

These practitioners counter the notion of a specialized artistic arena where only the privileged few have creative access with the practice of meeting the needs of specific local communities, and with creating opportunities for dialogue or coalition around common needs or problems. As Jan Cohen-Cruz claims, ". . . community-based performance values what is right there" (*Local 8*). And indeed, the very act of marginalized stories being told in these theater events comprises an important political gesture in this practice, that of increased visibility.²² It does however also implicitly critique the representational modalities practiced by large regional theaters who import their actors from Broadway and export their artistic directors to other large urban centers.²³ Therefore, CBT brings marginalized information into circulation, but it also transforms the practices of being-together, or what, as I mentioned in chapter one, Massimo De Angelis called the relational practices, which occur during the theatrical process itself.

As much as I appreciate Cohen-Cruz's articulation of the mission of community-based theater, it is important to realize that what is *right there* is not ever

²² Increased visibility is often the stated goal of community-based theater. zAmya, for example, emphasizes the extent to which its theatrical practice makes room for those experiencing homelessness to tell their own stories, in their own words, in a way which recuperates their omission from or distortion by mass media storytelling venues such as television shows. I will discuss in the next chapter, though, a few instances in which increased visibility also led to an increased vulnerability for some of zAmya's actors. My larger project in this dissertation also involves a critique of social change theater which sets up the privileged to "help" the disadvantaged to increase their visibility, improve their economic situation, etc, but more on that later.

²³ Social change theater scholar Scott Walters offers an inspiring critique of this practice in his open letter to NEA chairman Rocco Landesman. See Walter's blog at <http://lessthan100k.wordpress.com/>.

something that can be un-problematically transferred to the stage. Art is always an act of translation, so what is right there, such as the life stories that participants experience outside the performance space, is inevitably transformed once it passes through stage conventions and audience expectations. For example, activist performance scholar Sonja Kuflinec remarks in her book on Cornerstone Theatre that “. . . theatrical framing can lead to essentialism, as representation within a narrative format often allows for only one interpretation of a rite, individual, or group. Consequently, that one interpretation can be read as representing the whole” (*Staging* 163). I’d like to illustrate this concept with an example from a zAmya rehearsal. In the 2007 road show *There’s No Place Like Home*, an adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz*, there was a concern among some actors about casting an African American actor in the role of the Bad Witch, who in zAmya’s production was a drug dealer and pimp. After a brief conversation about how this casting choice might fall into the trap of inadvertently propagating racial stereotypes, the actor in question, Larry, was simply and swiftly re-cast into the role of the Good Witch, and a white housed woman was cast as the Bad Witch. Problem solved.

In zAmya’s production, however, the Good Witch was a government worker who proved completely ineffectual in dealing with the problems that the characters experiencing homelessness faced in the play: this “Good” Witch was mostly paralyzed within a maze of inefficient bureaucratic systems. The Bad Witch, by contrast, actually had quite a bit of agency by virtue of her control over her own means of production, her social and spatial mobility, and a certain sexual confidence displayed by the actress who ended up playing her. The Good Witch had a very pedestrian quality about him – he

discussed his kid's soccer practice and tried, but failed, to provide concrete services for the characters who came to him for help. The Bad Witch had a mystical quality about her – she showed up in unexpected places, often in a puff of smoke, and promised what appeared to be magical solutions to the characters' problems. Despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that the Bad Witch operated in an informal economy, her character was felt to have more power and was, frankly, a more commanding personality.²⁴ I felt that she *gathered* more of our attention than the Good Witch could, she occupied more space in the audience's consciousness.

The cast wished to avoid the very trap that Kuflinec articulates, that of presenting a story that could have been interpreted too narrowly by the audience. But their solution – shuffling skin colors – was essentially a semiotic one, and ignored the lived reality of these characters' dimensionality, especially the reality of their agentic potential. It perhaps even, on a larger scale, exacerbated the violence done to people of color by preventing further dialogue around the painful social topic of racism: because Larry did not play the Bad Witch on stage, the notion of how his body may have been re-presented (in Levin's understanding of the term, that is, made into an object through perception) by the audience was never made available for discussion in talkback.

Although I understand and am sympathetic with the fact that the cast wished to avoid *yet again* representing a person of color as a criminal (stereotypes perpetuated on television programs like *Cops*), perhaps having Larry play the Bad Witch *could* have produced the opportunity in the space of dialogue of the talkback (or, really, within the performance itself) to dispel some of the mythologies which surround certain people of

²⁴ This is not to discount the many intricate connections that exist between formal and informal economies, such as the way "illegal" immigrants are subcontracted by "legal" corporations (Gowan 84, 104).

color who operate, often of necessity, in informal economies. It could have provided the space to de-villify certain groups of marginalized people and to recognize their agency in alternative social spaces; it could have revealed the social and political infrastructure that causes the population of those experiencing homelessness to be comprised of a far greater majority of people of color than the general population, and it could have pointed the finger at conventions of formal economies which engender the existence of informal economies through practices of exclusion.²⁵ Perhaps it is counterintuitive, but by *lingering* with the pain which racism produces (not only the obvious pain it produces in people of color, but also the discomfort it produces in white people who are “trying not to make the situation worse”) the production could have gone further towards revealing and dismantling the very structures which perpetuate racist stereotypes.

Additionally, although all the actors involved, including Larry, participated in the conversation and ultimately agreed that this casting switch would avoid the kinds of negative connotations that having Larry play the Bad Witch might have provoked, the conversation and debating happened mostly between educated, white, housed women (primarily between Maren, zAmya’s director, and another long-time zAmya actor, Crystal). Larry was certainly asked for his opinion and he agreed to the casting switch, but he did not initiate the conversation. I will describe (and critique) this gesture in later chapters as “helping” – even if it is a well-meaning gesture, it suggests that Larry

²⁵ From the 2006 Wilder report on homelessness in Minnesota: “Black, American Indian, and Hispanic people continued to make up the majority (54%) of the adult homeless population, while they make up fewer than 10 percent of the overall Minnesota adult population.” For youth the statistics are even more startling – two thirds of homeless youth are people of color, and a whopping 80% of homeless youth in the metro area are people of color (2).

cannot “help” himself, but must be looked out for by the more privileged members of the project.

I do think the intentions of the cast were good ones: wanting to avoid repeating acts of oppression by mimicking stereotypes. But I want to be clear here – in addition to the problem of “helping,” the problem I focus on in this chapter is precisely *that* the concern of the cast was to deal in representations. The objective was to avoid portraying a person of color as the bad guy and contributing to the circulation of damaging and inaccurate stereotypes. But there is no way to make one accurate representation of real life onstage because real life is complicated and contradictory and resists narrow interpretation: there is, strictly speaking, no way to represent real life onstage. The stage has its own lived reality.

The problem with casting the witches points to what seems to be a more widespread problem with the production of community-based theater. Kuflinec again articulates this problem in her work with Cornerstone Theater. She describes a Cornerstone collaboration with Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut, where, “for all its inclusions, adaptations, and references, the play [*The Good Person of New Haven*] could not embrace or fully represent the city” (167). Although this was seen by some as a shortcoming of the production, Kuflinec mentions that these “incomplete” representations actually led to some fruitful dissent during the rehearsal process that mirrored the Brechtian strategies in the play (168). I’d like to take a step back, though, and ask what might be a perfectly obvious question: Why *should* a play represent (and fully) a city? Why should a community-based play mirror the community that creates it? And here, I am understanding representation as a standing for or a

standing in for, as opposed to Levin's definition as primarily an act of transforming what we see. I can think of a slew of arguments *for* this practice. The effort to "fully represent" might be connected to the desire to produce visibility for the marginalized. It could be a result of the influence of realism, popularized by the Little Theatre movement which was developing at the same time as the regional/local movement out of which community-based theater grew (Cohen-Cruz, "Ecology"). It could have to do with television and its claim to representational authenticity, which might be compelling theater audiences to expect theater to appear as "real" or realistic as television. Robert Leonard mentions in an essay about grassroots theater that representational staging functions as a response to a "national market apparatus leveling local culture" ("Grassroots"). In this sense, representation in CBT could be thought of as a survival strategy waged in response to a consumerist culture.

Many of these seem like convincing arguments for representation to continue to exist as the primary story-telling device in the civically-engaged theater space. However, I think there is a crucial and fundamental problem with a representational methodology in CBT, and it has to do with what it reveals about contemporary theatrical (and even, more broadly, social) conventions as a whole: the desire for the stage to function primarily as a visual field (where the eye reigns supreme) rather than as a ground for direct encounter (where other senses and ways of knowing contribute to the meaningfulness of the event), and the way this desire is produced in and by dominant space. As I mentioned earlier, Heidegger's notion of enframing describes a gesture of mastery. Enframing keeps the picture at a distance, and locates the other as knowable only in relation to the position of the subject: the enframer forms the

enframed. Through enframing, argues Heidegger, the enframed becomes object (*Question 132*). Enframing's modus operandi in the theater is the representational medium: the actor's body is reduced to the status of an object by the spectator's gaze and this object-body becomes a sign which stands in for another character or idea. The object-body is easily manipulated or "placed" by the script, by the director, and by the audience's looking and desires (hence, Levin's concept of *re-presentation*). The actor's actual body is by-passed, dissolving into the character's body. Incidentally, this is the jargon in a lot of actor training programs, which aim to reduce the body to "neutral." The attempt of the training program is to strip the body of its accumulated habits. The body that is prized is the protean body that can disguise itself, *unencumbered by itself*, as many different characters. As I know from experience, this can produce a profound alienation in the actor, who is constantly pressured to forget her history and erase the markings upon her body. This alienation can have an undesirable effect upon the body of the actor who is privileged or housed or otherwise not "too" marginalized; but it can have a devastating effect upon the bodies of disenfranchised populations who appear on the stage, compounding the acts of erasure or other kinds of violence initiated by the dominant gaze already in place outside the theater space.²⁶

The tendency toward thinking theater as a representational medium also produces a kind of violence in the audience. As has been suggested, the radical divide

²⁶ I'm not suggesting that, say, the actors experiencing homelessness cannot or do not play other characters besides themselves. My point is that a zAmya actor would never be asked to eliminate an accent or a physical habit, or a marker of their homelessness – see my story about Ed's plastic spoons in chapter three. Additionally, the stories gathered at zAmya make their way to the stage in a variety of ways – sometimes actors speak in a strictly autobiographical fashion, sometime stories are told in a more collaborative or polyphonic way, and sometimes personal narratives are transmuted through the art-making process into flights of the imagination, whimsical fantasies along the lines of the Bling Bling Brothers circus scenes, also detailed in chapter three.

between audience and actor permits the audience to avoid engaging with actors as humans and as subjects. This is a troubling repercussion of the hegemony of dominant space (as discussed in chapter one). However, this refusal to engage with others extends inwards as well: that is, audiences also become unwilling to engage with *themselves* as subjects, as live and agentic bodies within the social space of the theatre event. Audiences who perceive there to be an intractable distance between their own viewing selves and the objects of their conquering vision become unwilling to consider their own complicity in the practice of making an other into an object. Paradoxically, *a theater which utilizes a representational modality is a live event which tries to erase live bodies*. Under these circumstances, then, I would caution CBT, which claims to be primarily concerned with meeting the needs of “those without privilege” (Leonard et al “Performing”), against using representational methodologies in its staging practices, against trying to ‘fully represent a city’ on stage, against executing this second act of violence towards bodies already oppressed (distorted or ignored) by mainstream economic or political systems.

But what are the alternatives? What can CBT do to avoid re-casting the oppressed body as an object on stage? What if we, those of us who make or witness or write about CBT, were to temporarily release the theater from its representational responsibilities, both through our staging practices and through our performance critique, so that we could also really oblige it to be an arena for action and encounter? What if theater were to become a place of doing rather than a place for looking, in a radical departure from its Greek etymological origins (that of a theatron, a place for

seeing)? What if it became a haptic space rather than only a representational field, for actors *and* for audiences?

The irony here, of course, is that theater *is* a haptic space, but those of us who attend it with any regularity have become so accustomed to reading it primarily as a field of signs that the lived or material reality almost melts away during the course of the (often violent) act of our perception. As Bert States suggests, we should employ a “binocular vision,” which admits that “semiotics and phenomenology are best seen as complementary perspectives on the world and on art” (*Great* 8). This present study tends more toward the phenomenological as an act of recuperation or supplementation, rather than as an act of replacement.²⁷ I use the phenomenological attitude to attenuate myself with more care to the embodied encounters occurring in the theater space, to brush aside the “film of familiarity” or residue of habit (Shelley qtd. in States, “Phenomenological” 369). In this spirit, I’d like to return to Cohen-Cruz’s notion of the *right there* to construct a model of analysis for civically-engaged performance, but amend it to mean that right-there-ness of the theater space itself. My aim will be to allow the lived existence of the rehearsal and performance arenas to present themselves to my consciousness, in a way which avoids making an object of zAmya’s participants. In other words, I’d like to apply the phenomenological attitude to my experiences at zAmya, to privilege lived experience, embodiment, and the agentive potential of the human body. This is a way of valuing what is right there by receiving the event as it manifests in space and materiality and through encounter and across time, by trying to look at what is there rather than *re-presenting* to myself what presents itself to me (as

²⁷ Although chapter four, which deals with narratives and their production, performs a kind of phenomenology of language, and thus deals more with the semiotic “eye” of States’ binocular vision.

Levin says). Of course, I speak from my own position, and through my own lenses, and I can hardly avoid doing so – this study (and the phenomenological attitude) is necessarily subjective, and as such my work is an act of translation, just as the performance itself is a translation. What I am attempting to do, though, is to encounter the bodies *before* I theorize them, to draw conclusions based on my observations of and encounters with zAmya’s participants rather than the other way around – trying to fit bodies neatly into categories of thought and meaning. This way, when I talk about what the events mean I am not by-passing the body to do so (as I might do in a reading of the body as a representation of some other character or theme); instead, I am situating meaning in the activity of the biological and social bodies themselves. I will also suggest that *making* theater in this fashion avoids the kind of representational violence that occurred in the example of casting the witches I narrated earlier.

A compelling phenomenological approach, a way to proceed from the embodied event first, is articulated by Stanton B. Garner and explicated best in the rupture Garner identifies between Brechtian and what he terms post-Brechtian dramatic literature. In Brechtian drama, in accordance with Brecht’s deployment of the Russian Formalist notion of defamiliarization and the tenets of epic theater, the body becomes “a sign of itself” held up for critical contemplation (Garner 164). Brechtian dramaturgy employs a multitude of techniques to interrupt the audience’s tendency toward emotional catharsis (song, scene title placards, character “quotation,” the *gestus*, etc.), and hopes to leave them instead in a state of critical social- and self-reflection, thinking especially about class inequalities. As important as Brecht’s work has been, Garner suggests that the technologies designed to achieve his alienation effect produce a kind of violence-

through-representation that impacts the actual body of the actor onstage. Garner suggests that since Brecht's death, generations of writers have cropped up that approach the defamiliarization of the audience to political violence in a new way. He proposes the term "post-Brechtian anatomy" to signal a break from this sort of representational violence: Garner argues that post-Brechtian dramatists work to "phenomenalize the political, and to pursue its roots in the personal realities of embodiment and world-constitution" (162). These dramatists write characters who, through their very corporeal presence and effacement, "challenge the representational detachment of Brechtian political theater and claim a new field of depiction and response" (161).

The work of post-Brechtian dramatists reveals itself most clearly in response to the ideas foregrounded in Brecht's own essays, two of which I'll quote. First, writing in 1931, Brecht states:

Today, when the human being has to be seen as 'the sum of all social circumstances' the epic form is the only one that can embrace those processes which serve the drama as matter for a comprehensive picture of the world. Similarly man, flesh and blood man, can only be embraced through those processes by which and in course of which he exists. (Willett 46)

And secondly, in a later discussion about defamiliarization, Brecht observes that a "representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (192). In the epic theater, then, the body as lived (the "flesh and blood man") is *by-passed* in favor of beholding that body as an alienated, or defamiliarized, representation of itself in order to analyze the way it functions within or is overpowered by a series of social processes. Moreover, the dramatic body is represented within what Brecht calls a "picture of the world," literally situated within a particular frame for the viewing audience. So, although Brecht's

process of defamiliarization can bring an empowered clarity to a member of the audience who is a victim (or, I would argue along with Freire, a perpetrator) of political oppression, it also runs the risk (by engaging representational modalities) of dehumanizing the *actor's* body on stage by reducing it to an object, or a sign of itself.

While I don't think Garner would argue that what we might call the political function behind defamiliarization has been (or should be) erased in post-Brechtian drama, he does rather recognize a new methodology: instead of using a "representation that alienates" to provoke a critique of social forces, as in Brecht's drama, the lived body itself performs this labor in contemporary political theater. The post-Brechtian anatomy appears as a phenomenon in these written and performed plays, but it also begs a different kind of performance analysis – even if the production reveals a phenomenalized body onstage, performance analysis can still revert back to objectifying gestures, such as reading the dramatic body *solely* based upon its semiotic output. Instead, a kind of analysis which responds specifically to the phenomenalized body would, as Bert States says, identify the bird in the feeder as not only a sign of spring, but also as a bird ("Phenomenological" 375). To observe the body phenomenologically, as a theater analyst, does not itself free the oppressed body: it is not a utopian gesture, but one in which the analyst seeks to have an encounter with the essence of a dramatic body on stage.²⁸ In doing so, this analytic gesture seeks to resist the second act of

²⁸ Phenomenological essence has come a long way since Husserl. Bert States describes the essence of a dramatic character as a "field of behavioral potentiality:" it is what, in any given production, makes Othello Othello and not Hamlet ("Phenomenological" 373). The phenomenological essence is a "transaction between consciousness and the thickness of existence" (378). Essence here is not a universal quality, but a set of meanings which are in fact highly variable and portable, extending out into a wide web whose source is a singular instance of encounter between observer and observed, or rather, as Merleau-Ponty might suggest, a mutual encounter of embodied perception (thereby resisting the subject/object binary). This gesture implicates both observer and observed into the meaning-making process and is, in fact, the opposite of objectivism (Garner 26-27).

violence that representation perpetrates upon the already-oppressed body onstage, that of turning a live body into a sign, of objectifying and thereby disappearing that body. This is of special concern to theater-makers who are members of disenfranchised populations and their allies, and therefore to this present project.

Let's look at the kinds of bodies that Garner suggests populate the contemporary phenomenized stage. The post-Brechtian anatomy tends to be a traumatized one: it "is often a body tortured, disciplined, confined, penetrated, maimed, extinguished . . ." (Garner 161). It is made "inert" (179), though, not by its intentional submission into a sign held up for the critical gaze by the playwright, but by actual violent acts (engendered by violent social and political forces) which mark the body in the world of the play. This marked body appears onstage not as a sign of violence created for contemplation, but as an actual, traumatized dramatic body. The mark of violence upon the body is not semiotic or referential (the mark does not point away from the body toward meaning), but acutely *embodied*: the mark is an inscription in the most literal sense, an imprint which reveals the body itself more clearly as a site for interaction and negotiation between subject and world (162). The lived, marked body itself, then, becomes the means by which an audience experiences "an awakening to political awareness and intervention" (183).

Garner uses Edward Bond's play *Lear* as an example. In this play, trauma materializes when the characters' bodies become subject to physical incarceration.

"But," claims Garner,

these instances of external imprisonment reflect a more fundamental incarceration on the level of the body itself: the perceptual enclosure effected by pain and the resulting cancellation of *the subject's ability to extend itself within*

the space it inhabits and thereby humanize this space according to its presence. If the senses constitute the means of access to the world – the registers by which this subject seeks to externalize itself in its environment – then the violence that seems to subsume all else in *Lear* seeks to attack the individual’s *spatializing gestures* at their origin. (179 emphasis added)

An analysis of spatializing gestures is an example of using phenomenology to register the impact of social or political forces on the body, of looking at those forces from inside lived experience and perception, and is what I will adopt from Garner’s work for my conversations about zAmya’s theater in the rest of this chapter.

Although Garner’s phenomenological method can be used to reveal the body’s oppression and the way it has been traumatized, as in the above example from Bond’s *Lear*, it can also be used to identify ways in which the body has become liberated. Garner explores these latter kinds of spatializing gestures in contemporary women’s theater, such as Maria Irene Fornes’ *Fefu and her Friends*, as sites which “address[] the stage and its traditions by pressuring them to accommodate the voice of women’s experience” and as “attempts to reclaim the stage for female corporeal experience” (198). He describes the performance artwork of Karen Finley and Annie Sprinkle as efforts to “de-eroticize the body as visual object,” efforts Garner suggests might not always succeed in resisting the voyeurs in these performers’ audiences (198-9). Nonetheless, the reclamation of performance space for a female body that resists its own objectification, its own being-made-into-sign, is a significant spatializing gesture that Garner posits has come into being in the post-Brechtian era and, indeed, within the very projects that consider themselves most influenced by Brecht.

The spatializing practice of reclamation is also a useful device through which to theorize and stage community-based performances such as zAmya’s. Obviously

spatializing materializes differently on zAmya's stages than it does, for example, in the work of Karen Finley, who often performs her explicitly political solo shows in the nude, covered with chocolate or honey, ranting fragments of text filled with violent, chaotic themes. But there seems to be a similar intention behind the gesture which, in both cases, demands that attention be paid to stories and bodies which often go overlooked or are distorted by other "story-telling machines," such as television, news media, or even families or schools. Finley's work enacts a gesture of reclamation by, as Garner posits, seeking to de-eroticize the nude female body, or as performance scholar Elinor Fuchs argues, by resisting the hegemony of "finished narratives and . . . finished narrators" ("Staging" 48). zAmya's work, less sophisticated perhaps (and certainly less postmodern) than Finley's, also argues that the body experiencing homelessness is not merely an object which can be brushed to the margins of vision – the pervasive example here is illustrated by the housed person who nervously avoids eye contact with a homeless panhandler on the sidewalk – but is in fact a human subject, one who has the right to articulate his or her own identity and history in the manner of his or her own choosing. When zAmya is able to bring attention to the phenomenological, that is, to the direct experience of perception, I believe that they are most successful – when they get caught up in trying to represent the homeless "the right way," such as in the case of casting the witches I mentioned earlier, then the work becomes more propagandistic than dialogic, hampering its ability to enact relevant, intimate social change.

Before moving on to a discussion of the way spatializing gestures manifest in zAmya's 2008 roadshow, though, I'd like to add one more theoretical device to the mix. Sonja Kuflinec offers a particularly valuable way of thinking about the theater space as

a site of critical reflection, and one which mitigates the violence possible in representational modalities. After Cornerstone had spent five years on the road, making shows with communities across the United States, they settled in Los Angeles and began a different phase in their company's history that had to do with investigating various communities within a single geographical locale. At the time (2001), Kuftinec interviewed Managing Director Leslie Tamaribuchi who, in response to a question about whether Cornerstone continued to function as a national theater, said, "I value too well the diversity and complexity of America to pretend to represent it. Maybe a better question is, 'Do our values have resonance with principles that hold the nation together?'" In response to this statement, Kuftinec then proposed, "This articulation of the company's work in relation to principles rather than representational practices proposes perhaps a way of *un-staging* America" (188 emphasis added).

What could that mean, un-staging? For Kuftinec, it has to do with exploring values and the negotiation of identity, both personal and political; it also promotes a rethinking of the notion of community, both local and national (188-9). Un-staging parallels her research methodologies, which are both deconstructive, in their critique of the way meanings and identities are crafted and archived, and *constructive*, in that she is interested in the reciprocal exchange of various kinds of knowledge. Un-staging also questions the logic of representational practices: rather than trying to stage an accurately mimetic visual field, Cornerstone's practice has become a process of making transparent the rituals which "Americanize," such as pageantry rituals which "regulate a certain kind of American citizen – one who is well-behaved, rooted in one place, and Christian" (27). By questioning the ritual, by revealing and scrutinizing the constitutive

signs which encrust the lived body, un-staging can then serve to refocus attention back *upon* that body itself. To make this claim is to insist that embodiedness often exceeds the meanings that can be construed semiotically – that the body *means* in ways which exceed the sign’s ability to thoroughly excavate (hence the value of the binocular vision). As Kuftinec says about a Cornerstone production: “The ‘realness’ of these actors’ presence seems to defy the more distanced character quotations Brecht advocated by provoking intellectual rather than seductive emotional engagement” (170).

What’s more, it should come as no surprise that a refocused attention to embodiment often reveals a body marked in violent or traumatic ways, much like the kind of body Garner identifies in post-Brechtian drama. But shouldn’t a recognition of this trauma be an important element of community-based theater? One of the critiques often leveled at CBT is the way it celebrates “togetherness” at the expense of making valuable critiques about social institutions. But un-staging allows both – it allows deep focus to be paid to living bodies while also “breaking up” the visual field and revealing the ways those bodies are entangled in various institutional structures which wield a lot of (often invisible) power over them.

To summarize this section, if the body onstage were perceived by the audience to exist in all its lived complexity and contradiction, rather than being reduced to a sign of itself (with inherently limited signifying potential), then the theatrical space could be transformed from a visual field filled with moving “objects” consumed by passive spectators to a site where the possibility for actual engagement might occur between subjects. The effort here is not to promote the creation of more “realistic” portrayals on stage; it is, rather, to resist the idea that theater need be a completely, or primarily,

representational medium. I therefore posit, following in the wake of Garner's and Kuftinec's theorizations, that community-based theater can provide a radical response to the body-made-sign. As much as it is the frame, or the act of enframing, that marks the lived body as an object on stage, CBT (and CBT scholars) should seek to displace or question that frame, thereby jarring the barrier that prevents the theatrical event from becoming an arena of encounter among subjects. Furthermore, if, as Garner states, the 20th century post-Brechtian anatomy is characterized by trauma, albeit one which recovers the material body from its alienated position as sign, then CBT might mitigate that trauma by offering the oppressed body (both onstage and off) an opportunity to "extend itself within the space it inhabits and thereby humanize this space according to its presence" (Garner 179).

The Spatializing Body in zAmya's *There's No Place Like Home*

In this section, I focus on the spatializing practices in the world of zAmya's 2007 roadshow *There's No Place Like Home*. Following Garner, I'm interested in what the characters *do*. This is not to ignore the semiotic potential of images created by the production, but to render the gaze gently toward what is often overlooked in performance analyses of civically-engaged theater: the body.

First, and to be perfectly obvious, zAmya creates theater with those experiencing homelessness onstage and in focus. The productions themselves perform a critical function by revealing what or who has been omitted through the practices of more mainstream American theater-making. The bodily presence of the actors who have experienced homelessness reveal the fissures in and limitations of, for example,

the Guthrie's performance conventions. To use Kuftinec's terminology, zAmya un-stages the Guthrie (or the Walker, or even Ten Thousand Things),²⁹ by placing the actor who has experienced homelessness onstage and encouraging that person to speak his or her own stories rather than stories that are imagined by someone else (such as a playwright) and then grafted upon the actor's body.³⁰ The person experiencing homelessness finds a place and a voice in the audience as well. zAmya performs for a wide variety of organizations, from businesses in the financial sector to temporary housing shelters, so as to encourage a wide diversity of housing experience for each performance's run.

At zAmya, the space of performance is owned (if only fleetingly) by the bodies of zAmya's actors, some of whom own no other place of permanence. The body which has no home dwelling extends into the space of performance, making a sort of makeshift home for itself there in narrative and embodiment, claiming space through story and gesture and image. Although the act of spatializing during the creation of a theatrical event certainly does not replace having a physical home dwelling, it offers zAmya's participants the opportunity to speak, to articulate their stories in a manner of their own choosing, and to be part of a temporary community. bell hooks describes the homeplace created by African American women in her childhood as

the site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people

²⁹ These are three performance projects in Minneapolis, MN. The Guthrie Theater is a major regional theater. The Walker is a modern art museum that hosts performances from out of town. Ten Thousand Things performs plays for underserved populations, but, like the Guthrie and the Walker, staffs its casts with professional, housed actors.

³⁰ There is a caveat to this which I discuss later – in most zAmya shows a dramaturg or playwright helps shape the workshop material into a script. The difference that I'm pointing towards, however, is the one between a local community theater performing, say, *The Producers* because it's such a big hit on Broadway, and the way zAmya creates new plays in response to stories that the participants involved in the process tell.

could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world. (42)

I think zAmya seeks to become a similar site of resistance through humanization, even though zAmya is very different from hooks' homeplace in many ways. zAmya is composed of a shifting and heterogeneous population: homeless and housed; black, white, and Native American; trained artists and non-self-identified performers. But the group is bound together by a common desire to create a space free of violence and oppression, a space of agency where firsthand accounts of homelessness can be told. The creation of this kind of space resists the various ways in which these stories are distorted or erased outside the theater space, and critiques the kinds of operations which distort or erase (I'll talk about these operations below in connection to specific moments in zAmya's shows). The act of resistance at zAmya is most effective when it is radically local, when it arises in the fertile space of possibility between bodies in performance, in the very spatializing gesture of claiming a space and a voice which has previously been denied.

As I will use the rest of the chapter to describe, these gestures can be seen in specific examples from *There's No Place Like Home*. The main characters from the original story, Dorothy, Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion, are re-imagined as people experiencing homelessness who are on a journey to the Minneapolis Government Center to acquire different kinds of aid. The play is designed to demythologize homelessness and de-villify those experiencing homelessness, demonstrating that many different factors contribute to this condition, such as natural disasters, mental illness, broken families, or gambling addictions. This un-staging of

the homeless stereotype serves to (re)frame the actor experiencing homelessness as subject within and beyond the narrative line and embodied space of performance. The actual practice of un-staging can be glimpsed in the characters' spatializing gestures.

For example, Scarecrow has lost his job and wandered away from home, pledging to himself that he won't return until he has thought of a solution to take care of his family. When we encounter him in the story, though, Scarecrow has claimed a street corner and doesn't want to leave it. His rootedness to the corner is a playing out of spatializing gestures: in lieu of a home dwelling, Scarecrow appropriates this public space by parking his only possession there, a cart full of empty cans, and is reluctant to leave when Dorothy asks him to accompany her to the Government Center. This space has become a sort of home for those cans and, by extension, for Scarecrow himself – it is a space which Scarecrow has created to rest in, to regroup, to make plans. It is only when Dorothy suggests that he can take the cans with him (they are traveling to the Government Center to seek housing aid) that he concedes to leave. It's not the street corner itself that takes the place of home, then, but the *act* of lodging his meager possessions there. Scarecrow humanizes the space by storing his belongings in it, by *acting* in it. Rather than drifting endlessly through the city, a perpetual stream of flows which threaten to swallow his body into anonymity, Scarecrow uses the cans to extend his body out into space, claiming it, rooting his body in a gesture which reasserts his subjectivity and his right to move as he chooses, a gesture which proclaims, *I exist*. Scarecrow's rootedness to this corner is a double gesture: it marks both the trauma of being homeless and the resistance which his body performs to mitigate that trauma.

In a play on the stereotype of the homeless body "taking up space" on the city streets, an unsightly blemish that must be covered up or shunted away from the public gaze, this act of occupying public space marks Scarecrow's body as an active interface between his subjectivity and a social and economic world that is trying to eradicate him. A painful and confusing example of this erasure is evident in our own recent history. The Democratic National Convention in 2008 took place in Denver, Colorado. It being a remarkable year for the Democratic party, and for the American electoral process in general, the area was due to receive a tremendous amount of global media attention. It was reported that the convention planners would distribute free movie tickets to people experiencing homelessness, and that local hair salons were giving free haircuts to street dwellers before the convention. The media storm around these stories was of course taken up with sheer delight by conservative pundits. As I review the print media sources that evolved around this issue it is difficult to know exactly how the stories started, but perhaps this unfortunate quote is what spun it all into action: "To give them haircuts and make them all spiffed up for the Democratic National Convention, because they are part of our community as well," said Ghandia Gohnson, co-owner of Sly's Salon, about the customers experiencing homelessness who were being given free haircuts the Monday before the convention came to town (Sallinger). It seemed that the city was collectively trying to erase or temporarily sweep aside its unsightly homeless population to give itself a clean face for the cameras.

Strangely enough, these allegations were not taken up by the convention planners, but by the city's homelessness advocates, who vigorously denied them. There was evidently a comprehensive campaign staged by organizations like Denver's Road

Home to inform the public that shelters were offering extended hours for those who wished to stay away from the hustle and bustle of the convention for their own safety. They also argued that salons often extended free services to those experiencing homelessness, and not just for the convention. One organization, the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, did confess to a plan to distribute movie tickets but then retracted it because they thought its meaning was being “horribly misconstrued” (Malan). But if the effort was genuinely to ensure the safety of those experiencing homelessness, why was this gesture revoked? It also raises the question: why aren’t those experiencing homelessness given the kind of attention and shelter they need at all times of the year? Although the defensive position assumed by the city’s homeless advocates was surely done in the interest of protecting their work (by which I also mean their funding) and their clientele, I think in reality it succeeded in releasing the convention planners (and the convention winners) from actually being held accountable for these acts of erasure.

Whichever side you want to align yourself with, and this issue is clearly divided along partisan lines, the fact is that those experiencing homelessness were off the streets during the convention to a greater degree than they were any other week of the year. The bodies which normally traversed the city in search of food, shelter, companionship, or medical services were removed, so to speak, to make way for the more normalized and publicly valued activity of the convention. Whether it was an effort to clean up the city’s image, or to ensure the safety of those most vulnerable, the bodies and histories of those experiencing homelessness were disappeared from view during the time and space of the convention. It is acts of erasure such as these that provide the impetus for

Scarecrow's spatializing gesture, that valiant effort to push his body out into space before it disappears from view forever.

To return to the play, and to Scarecrow's street corner, we also discover in this scene that Dorothy needs Scarecrow to navigate the confusing geography of urban Minneapolis (she can't figure out, among other things, why Hennepin Avenue runs in two perpendicular directions). This is particularly significant because Dorothy is played by a housed actor and Scarecrow by an actor experiencing homelessness. This relationship has deep resonance at zAmya. The knowledge and expertise possessed by the subject experiencing homelessness are not only made visible here, they are in fact desirable: this knowledge informs the very content and structure of the theatrical event. The characters in zAmya's shows are created in improvisational situations where participants draw on their own experiences to flesh out the stories brainstormed by the group (more on this in chapter four). I'm not sure I could characterize Scarecrow as autobiographical, but the character was born from Ed's storytelling and imagining, from his body and his history. The production process privileges Ed's life experiences as a legitimate form of knowledge.³¹

It is not only the expertise possessed by zAmya's actors that is valued, however, but also that which is contributed by its audiences. Lecia told me that at one performance, as Dorothy and Scarecrow deliberated the best way to travel to the Government Center, an audience member experiencing homelessness called out something like: "Take the Number 6!" The boundaries which normally enclose who

³¹ The 2009 show was more strictly autobiographical – the show revolved around a series of monologues created by the actors, many of whom overtly narrated their own life experiences with homelessness.

has knowledge and who can inform theatrical structure are intentionally kept open both in rehearsals and in performance at zAmya, to such an extent that the audience itself contributes to the narrative line. The suggestion of which bus to take was a spatializing gesture, even though it was an intervention that also occurred through language. The audience member not only imagined herself into the performance, she literally crossed the boundary between audience and stage with her embodied voice, and humanized the performance according to her own knowledge of navigating the public transport system in Minneapolis. This gesture re-frames the performance space as an arena for action and negotiation, redefining the relational practices therein. The bodies onstage are not distant signs to be read, but bodied subjects with which to interact.

This moment when the audience member spoke up in performance should be counted among the most efficacious moments of zAmya's production history (I've seen this sort of intervention happen a few times, as I'll discuss in later chapters). If I were to offer zAmya a critique, it would be to work more diligently toward creating the possibilities for these kinds of moments to occur frequently within the space of performance. Encounters between audiences and actors happen freely in the talkback, but there is something about the unexpectedness of the audience member who speaks up in performance, who breaks the rules and contributes to the story, that seems to me to be particularly effective. It could be as simple as the fact that I have been going to the theater for so long that a surprise like this especially delights me, but perhaps it is also that these moments are effective at disrupting the enframing process, at drawing attention to the social space of encounter, and to the bodies involved in that encounter, rather than theater's aesthetic dimensions, even if just for a moment.

Another spatializing gesture happens when Dorothy and Scarecrow encounter Rusty, this production's Tin Man, as she waits for a bus. "It's cold outside. It's warm on the bus," she replies to their queries of where she is headed. The cause of Rusty's homelessness is never explicitly named in the play (when questioned, Rusty won't talk about her past), but because I was in rehearsal I know that her character arose from conversations about children who run away from broken homes or foster care. As opposed to the violently incarcerated body that Garner observes in the plays of Edward Bond, or the reluctantly rooted body of the Scarecrow, political violence is marked upon Rusty's body by its inability to remain rooted: her body drifts. She moves because she must in order to stay warm, not because she wants to. Rusty's body is, in effect, confined *to* perpetual movement; and it is this unwilling but necessary movement through prescribed urban routes that is the mark of trauma upon her body, a body which involuntarily traverses the city, riding endlessly around on the public transport system to keep warm.

Dorothy and the Scarecrow do eventually persuade Rusty to join them on their journey to the Government Center with the hopes of finding housing aid. Soon enough, amidst a chorus of "Dealers and crackheads and pimps, oh MY!" the little group is jumped by the cowardly Gambler, who is trying to steal money to fund his next trip to the casino. The Gambler points a gun at them and demands money. They panic:

Dorothy:	But we don't have any money.
Gambler:	What do you mean you don't have any money?
Scarecrow:	We're a bunch of homeless people.
Rusty:	And a dog.
Toto:	Woof.

Then Rusty, in a rare moment of heartfelt bravery, stands up to the Gambler, “I’m not scared of you,” she says, “I know people like you.” They discover that his gun is a water pistol and yell at him, which scares the Gambler. They turn his own gun on him and “shoot” him down – he collapses into the fetal position, drenched and miserable. His cowardice quickly overcomes him and he succumbs to the group, crying and confessing his gambling habit and begging for understanding. They take pity and accept him quickly into their group; then they all resume their journey to the government center, singing a jaunty tune.

Within the moment of confrontation and the Gambler’s demand for money are contained a complex web of personal and social events, few of which are spoken in the play. From the audience (or from the position of scholarly reflection), we can “read” this moment in a number of ways. A textual analysis provides us with the information that he has a gambling addiction, which has led to his homelessness: getting back to the casino is just about the only thing his character talks about in the play. We can read the color of the Gambler’s skin and identify him as a representation of African-American male bodies on the margins of economic security, one body standing in for (and speaking for) a whole group. We also have a pop culture framework for the Gambler as a reincarnation of the Cowardly Lion from *The Wizard of Oz*, which might give us insight into his character choices, or help us think thematically about the fear and violence which can result from a serious gambling addiction. But these analyses by themselves all, in their fashion, point away from the body. So to engage the other “eye” of Bert States’ binocular vision, and to supplement a reading of the Gambler’s character, we can also encounter him from, as Donna Haraway says, “the view from a

body” (589). I especially wanted to discuss the Gambler because his character really helps reveal the value of the phenomenological frame I have been employing in this chapter for the analysis of theater and other embodied/lived events.³²

The Gambler’s spatializing habits draw an interesting distinction between what Garner refers to as *humanizing* the space one inhabits, and what could be considered as *colonizing* that space (or invading the space of others). Trauma is marked upon the Gambler’s body by his failure to distinguish between these two actions. His gambling addiction has interrupted his ability to extend into space without committing acts of violence. The Gambler’s spatializing practice is a desperate and warped attempt at connecting with both his own and others’ humanity. He reaches out into space, grasping and forceful and terrified, demanding that space, and the people contained therein, comply with his wishes. It is a visceral, bodied example of what Heidegger and Levin mean when they describe enframing. The Gambler’s spatializing practice actually *de-humanizes* the space he inhabits, but like a Möbius strip his practice also echoes a dominant space that has succeeded in de-humanizing the Gambler himself. Why does he gamble? We don’t know. The genesis of these actions are not spoken or shown. All we know is that gambling is all he has left, it is the only drive that consumes him, dictating his actions and relationships with all others. The Gambler leads a life that is restricted to a single, maddening activity, an activity characterized by grasping, striving, and desperate yearning. The Gambler is incarcerated, bodily, within a neurotic desire to regain admittance to the world of economic flows engendered by the system of

³² Again, the frame is drawn from the work of Bert States and Stanton B. Garner. Garner practices what he calls a postmodern phenomenology: “As the Husserlian tradition relinquishes its hold on the stable subject, bound in ideal self-givenness, it opens its domain to experience as we are learning to see it, in its dislocations and ambiguities, its variable modes of embodiment, its traces” (Garner 230).

capitalism; his excommunication from this system, and his resulting poverty and homelessness, produces a spatializing activity which thrusts forward and violates others' space. I'd like to think that it is not the Gambler thrusting himself into the world of the other three, but that it is capitalist desire pulling him in, through violence, to disrupt the intimate space of the small social grouping.

This small group, though, refuses to be violated. Because they have no money, they cannot contribute to the circulation of money that the Gambler is so desperately trying to remain a part of. The interruption in circulation produces a sort of paralysis in the Gambler, and once his cover as a tough guy is shot, Gambler is revealed as just a scared man holding a water pistol. His fractured bravado empowers the others; in the face of their refusal to participate in the Gambler's demands, Gambler then literally retreats into his own body, curling in upon himself to shield himself from the water attack they playfully wage against him. The scene viewed through binocular vision reveals the Gambler's body as what Garner describes as an interface between subjectivity and world, the site upon which political struggle is played out. The end of the scene has great symbolic potential; I could, for example, interpret the water as a sign of re-birth, as Gambler's opportunity to start over again in a new social order. Or I could point out the fact that once everyone is aware that there is no money to be exchanged, the nature of the scene shifts from one of violence to one of solidarity. But this second example also produces information through direct encounter, that is, we in the audience witness a shift from grasping spatializing gestures to welcoming ones. This is an example of the oscillation between semiotic readings and phenomenological encounters of embodiment that States and Garner suggest produce the richest reading of

the aesthetic event (and, as we can see in this example, it also lays the foundation for a materialist reading of social relations). By the end of the scene, Gambler's violence has been turned upon him by another: it is parodically enacted upon him through the water gun soaking. Then, through Gambler's own agency the violence is neutralized, and he stops moving through space in an oppressive way. The Mobius strip unfolds, and Gambler becomes part of a community intent on protecting the integrity and safety of everyone in the group. Acting *as* an engaged and supportive community rather than as rival individuals resists a dominant space which endeavors to cast all players as competitors on the market.

And indeed after this point, the group of individuals experiencing homelessness becomes one merry band of travelers who function as a cooperative. They arrive at the "mighty center of government at its steely grey heart" and are plunged into a long waiting line, where a cheery musical number takes place to the tune of "The Merry Old Land of Oz." The song is pure fun and silliness: each actor has a solo singing part at some point in the song, and it ends with a magnificently graceless, lumbering kickline. The lyrics animate the frustration of standing in line all day just to be refused assistance upon reaching the front of the line, but the *performance* of the song and its resonating affects are completely, delightfully frivolous. And yet, it occurs to me that this is a very important part of the show. During the summer institute I attended in 2009 at Sojourn Theater, civically-engaged performance maker Michael Rohd described the "ridiculous dances" his devising company created in rehearsals as spaces for play – they weren't ever intended to be compositions that ended up in a show, but they were still important parts of rehearsal. Sojourn company members live across the country and get together

periodically during the year for rehearsals, so Michael said that he gave time in rehearsal for activities like ridiculous dances because they missed each other, even though time was so limited and precious. The waiting-in-line number in zAmya's show seems to fulfill some of these same obligations; it opens up space in the performance for a sort of goofiness that doesn't happen during the course of events in a regular day, and it also lets participants celebrate each other's joviality. This fun musical number isn't good for anything other than feeling good: it cannot be traded on the commodities market, or stored in a bank, or exchanged for housing.³³ In this capacity, frivolity performs a kind of resistance to dominant space, allowing the body to demechanize, to move in different ways than it does on the street or at the office, while refusing to operate according to the logic of the market. The dance is a way for the body to extend into space and humanize it, defiantly, with joy. And it is a resistance that happens *right there*, in the performance space, producing an affect that travels around the room, infecting performers and audience members alike.

But the delightfulness of the musical number, as well as the bright fantasy of community, is short-lived. After the song, the crew is finally awarded government assistance, but they quickly discover that it doesn't meet their needs at all: no one will redeem Dorothy's section 8 housing vouchers, the wait list for Scarecrow's counseling appointment is months long, Rusty's teen run-away shelter is closed pending more funding, and the Gambler's rehab program is too short to be effective. When they go back to confront the wizard behind the curtain, all they discover is a large mirror, reflecting both them and the audience. They discover that the Center provides no magic

³³ And neither is it being sold for \$150 a pop, as many Broadway musical tickets are.

fix. Instead, the audience is invited, in the last line of the show, to turn to a neighbor and discuss one question they have about homelessness. They are not asked to *solve* homelessness, but, as Boal would say, to difficultate it. The mirror leads the production out of the realm of the narrative and into conversation with the temporary community gathered there that day. The talkback continues the work of the performance, a reflective practice of imagining and enacting alternative ways of being-together in society. There is no catharsis here, the way there was in the movie – the characters don't get back home, the difficulties persist, and as the narrative line fades the consciousness of the audience drifts back to the present moment, and the present space, the basement of a church which also houses a temporary shelter.

The talkback “breaks up” or un-stages the theatrical event in a number of ways. The talkback literally breaks up the audience into small groups of two or three – it is a pedagogical tactic designed to allow people to speak up in a more intimate situation who wouldn't otherwise have voiced an opinion in a large group. zAmya's talkback un-stages mainstream performance talkbacks by allowing audience members to talk to each other, rather than seeking “answers” from the cast or production team. The talkback also disrupts the boundary between performer and audience, as the performers drift through the audience and join conversation groups. As I mentioned earlier, this isn't the first time that boundary gets broken – audience members tend to speak up in performances, contributing to the narrative line during the show.

The talkback also recalls another liminal element that occurs during the performance, which breaks up the visual field and foreshadows that milling together of audience and performer at the end. This happens when the director, Maren, stands up

from her front row seat during the performance from time to time to read out various pieces of information about homelessness. She hovers there on the boundary between performers and witnesses. These little interludes are sort of stuck in (I think they were in fact conceived very late in the rehearsal process) in what could be considered a Brechtian gesture of defamiliarization. They are not confrontational, but offered as gifts, as food for thought, and they bring the attention of the audience continuously back to the present moment, and to the realness of the bodies of the present and temporary community gathered around this space of performance. Maren's appearance at the twilight space of the audience's vision tends to break the hypnotic spell of the theatrical frame. Maren's body also echoes our own witnessing bodies in the audience, causing a gentle self-reflection to happen throughout the performance, and then often find voice in the talkback.

These moments of un-staging, which are predicated on the audience's ability to spatialize within the world of the performance, are, in my opinion, far more effective measures of resistance than simply ensuring that audiences go home with the "right kind" of information. I don't think the theater should be a propaganda machine. Instead, I think its most delightful and useful value comes in the way it invites people to *act* differently with each other, or at the very least, reflect upon the way they act in society. The more the theater event can disrupt the practice of enframing, of turning an O/other into an object, the better chance it has to effect lasting "social change."

There is another important member of *There's No Place Like Home* that hasn't been mentioned yet. The characters who populate this performance were created in collaboration by the actors in workshops, story circles, and improvisations in rehearsal.

Those characters, though, were then incorporated into the story by a professional playwright, Joseph Evans. It may seem like a hegemonic move: the actors do all the labor and then Joseph takes their labor and manipulates it into the story he wants to tell anyway. In reality it is quite the contrary. Joseph's playwrighting was certainly an act of translation, and the fact that it was an adapted version of *The Wizard of Oz* also gave zAmya's performance a kind of structuring it doesn't normally have (many zAmya shows are devised entirely "from scratch"). But I found Joseph's playwrighting to be an act performed with an ethics of care. He always made the greatest effort to retain the style, rhythm, and speech of the story circle and workshop material participants contributed to the process. Joseph made copious notes, reviewed videos of workshops he was unable to attend, and presented drafts of the script to the actors for their approval. In a rehearsal for the 2006 show *Ten You Win/Ten You Lose*, I heard him give this advice to an actor who was struggling to remember the written text: "It's your story. You can tell it however you choose." Joseph's participation in the production has been that of an ally: his writing didn't dominate, it was an act of collaboration with the actors and as such, it was infinitely adaptable to the actors' real time revisions.

Ultimately, even though the story is given shape by a housed Project member, it is in the process of devising the performance, where the actors create the characters, that actors take the space to move as they *choose*, rather than move as they *must*. It is a liberatory gesture offered by the production process, and it is in this choice that zAmya (and many other CBTs) responds most directly to the traumatized body that Garner envisions in most contemporary political drama, such as Bond's. Rather than a body rendered inert by power, zAmya (at its most efficacious) not only imagines but literally

makes space for the body to move as it chooses, to stretch itself beyond the rigor imposed on it by a traumatizing environment, to enact a stance of curiosity, of reaching out into the world without violence. As one of the actors, Larry, said to me about his experience of homelessness, “People do get lost out here you know.” To return to bell hooks’ fitting metaphor, the production space crafted by zAmya provides a temporary homeplace for the actor who has experienced homelessness that works as both refuge and site of resistance, and suggests that resistance can arise more productively from a body that *feels* at home, that has a base or point of reference, and that engages in coalitional relationships with other individuals who have experienced homelessness and housed allies and friends. From this point, the process of un-staging the institution of homelessness can most productively begin.

Does zAmya solve the “problem” of homelessness? Of course not. Nor do I believe this should be their aim. zAmya’s productions offer a site of negotiation among citizens, an arena for revealing and thinking through social and political quandaries. And chief among those citizens are people who are experiencing homelessness, whose agency can be revealed (not created) and affirmed by the production process itself, whether those people are on stage or sitting in the audience. The performance is an embodied dialogue where those in homelessness and those who are housed encounter each other. It is the nature of this encounter which causes zAmya to be a resistant space, in the way it un-stages both the institution of homelessness and the institution of theater-making: the body of the actor experiencing homelessness is neither relegated to the status of object nor made invisible through the perceptual decisions of those more

economically fortunate (such as the businessman on the street who averts his eyes when faced with a panhandler), and the audience member is no longer able to sit back and dispassionately judge a field of signs.

In his writing about the anesthetizing effects of the society of the spectacle, Situationist and Marxist theorist Guy Debord recommended the following course of action: “The point is to take effective possession of the community of dialogue . . . which the works of poets and artists have heretofore merely *represented*” (*Society* 133). In fact, the community of dialogue is *not* merely re-presented at zAmya’s performances. It is diligently enacted. It bodies forth in multiple ways throughout the production process. In rehearsal, it appears as a parley between those who own houses and those who don’t about whose knowledge will reach the stage. In performance, it manifests when the characters take travel advice from an audience member. In the talkback, the community of dialogue is perhaps most evident, when audience members and actors together work through what it means to be part of a democratic process. It is the opportunity to engage in this dialogue, to spatialize through performance, that CBT offers as invitation to the traumatized body, both onstage and off.

Chapter Three Affective Circuits

. . . art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony.

Viktor Shklovsky

Theorizing Affect

In the last chapter I discussed spatializing gestures, that is, the way that actors and audience members traversed space and the extent to which that movement allowed them to humanize the space around them (how Scarecrow parked his cart of cans on a street corner, claiming space) or the extent to which they were prevented from doing so (the way Rusty involuntarily moved around Minneapolis on public transportation). This chapter also addresses movement, but this time through the lens of affect. Affect is, quite simply, one of the most important “main ingredients” of performance (not only on stage but in everyday life): it shapes and colors human interaction, individual decision-making, and general quality of life. Our affect system also sends us clues that can illuminate the kinds of ideological structures that impact us, but because feelings are so often stigmatized as a source of legitimate knowledge, these clues frequently go unnoticed. I will draw on three different theories of affect – a psychological, a sociological, and a cultural studies/art criticism model – in order to bring to light the social circuitry that affect impacts. This is vital to a discussion of efficacy in the theater because the arts are so notoriously difficult to assess; therefore, I propose in this chapter that the extent to which affective circuits are put into motion between the participants in a theatrical event constitutes a marker of its efficacy. Affective circuits are the second

of three sites discussed in this dissertation during which relational patterns that resist dominant space may occur in the theatrical process.

While affect is often colloquially collapsed into “emotion,” the concept has been more carefully theorized across several disciplinary fields. First, psychologist Silvan Tomkins differentiates the two terms by placing affect at the very beginning of a response cycle, by characterizing it as an instinctive reaction rather than the more complex state of emotion, which happens later in the response cycle and is cognitive (Zajonc 154). Psychiatrist Donald Nathanson offers a useful terminological breakdown by characterizing *affect* as a purely biological response, *feeling* as the awareness of one’s own affect, and *emotion* as feeling combined with all the memories one has accumulated of that affect being triggered in the past (*Shame* 49-59). His definitions suggest that affect is universal and instinctive, but that feeling and emotion are highly individualistic experiences whose interpretation is subject to particular histories and social contexts. Furthermore, even though affects are instinctive, all cultures are actively involved in trying to control (reroute or repress) individual affective responses, such as shaming a young boy for crying (70). If theater’s main concern is the exploration of the human condition in all its multiplicity, then this kind of control is something that theater should bring attention to, critique, and suggest alternative models for. One way zAmya accomplishes this is by highlighting the effects of the social stigma surrounding homelessness, the way it paralyzes those experiencing homelessness, and often prohibits them from leading full or satisfying lives. I will discuss other examples as the chapter progresses.

The notion that culture exercises control over feelings and emotions is also taken up by the second theorist I will mention, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild.³⁴ Hochschild is interested not only in how culture affects how people feel, but in how it affects what they “think and do about what they feel” (“Emotion” 552). She discusses a phenomenon that she calls emotion management or emotion work, a form of alienation of labor that occurs when, for example, an airline stewardess must assume a calm, reassuring emotional mask for the benefit of paying clients aboard the airplane where she works (*Managed* Ch. 6). What qualifies this gesture as emotion management, though, is when the airline worker not only assumes a mask, but when she goes a step further and tries to convince herself that she in fact *feels* calm. Emotion management occurs when a person feels compelled to comply with what Hochschild refers to as conventions of feeling, socialized (and socializing) rules which prescribe the appropriate way to feel in given circumstances (“Emotion” 552). She suggests that it is the moments when people *refuse* to engage in emotion management, when they refuse to not only “manage” their expressions but also their inner feelings, that serve to reveal the otherwise hidden structures of those rules or conventions of feeling (557, 561). In this chapter, I will use Hochschild to argue that the act of refusing to engage in emotion management and, instead, allowing the affect system to be triggered, achieve expression, and partake in circuits, is part of what makes theater efficacious, i.e. that refusing to engage in emotion management *is* social change.³⁵

³⁴ Hochschild’s definitions of affect, feeling, and emotion do not necessarily align with Tomkins/Donaldson’s: whereas Tomkins would separate an affect from an emotion, Hochschild would include both in her definition of the “emotive experience.”

³⁵ Unregulated affect is always expressive (showing up on the body or face, such as the bodily convulsion which marks startle or the delighted smile signaling joy) and it is contagious (the way one’s unbridled laughter or intense

Tomkins/Donaldson and Hochschild root affect in human psychological experience, but affect theorists from cultural studies and art criticism offer a different perspective. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze and radical psychoanalyst Félix Guattari maintain that affects are “autonomous and sufficient beings that no longer owe anything to those who experience or have experienced them” (“Percept” 467). Deleuze and Guattari are interested in affect as it occurs in “transhuman” territory, such as the way a painting or a piece of music produces affects.³⁶ Art critic Simon O’Sullivan, the third theorist I wish to bring into play, bridges the divide between psychological affect theorists and the “transhuman” model by arguing that affect creates a “portal” connecting humans to non-human worlds: affect is the “matter in us responding and resonating with the matter around us” (“Aesthetics” 128). Art is precisely a “bundle of affects,” argues O’Sullivan, and because both art and affect are “immanent to experience,” he suggests that his readers think of art as an *event* rather than as a text (in the tradition of deconstruction), an event which operates outside of signification and allows us (art’s participants) to see the world differently by “switch[ing] our intensive register” (126, 128).³⁷ O’Sullivan’s theory moves art interpretation away from reading (a text) and towards a messier kind of encountering, one which makes use of the whole,

fear “rubs off” on other people in the room). Tomkins suggests that this contagious quality of affect impacts our desire to communicate, to be intimate, and to avoid experiencing shame (66-7). That means that the affect system, which helps keep us alive, is also responsible for bonding us to other human beings. Theater provides, literally, a stage for these moments of connection, these affective circuits, to be produced and investigated.

³⁶ Deleuze goes so far as to question the existence of “things, persons, or subjects” (qtd. in O’Sullivan 128). As a Buddhist meditator, I can certainly appreciate this nod towards the principle of non-permanence. However, as someone who is arguing for the potential of community-based theater to bring significance to people’s lives, I sometimes find this philosophical stance a little distancing. Ultimately, I love the way this kind of affect theory has the potential to animate objects, but I worry about sticking exclusively with a theory that excludes human’s production of affect.

³⁷ O’Sullivan says, “you cannot read affects, you can only experience them” (“Aesthetics” 126). Affect’s slipperiness to the grasp might be the very source of its potential for resistance to dominant technologies designed to produce legibility.

sensate body and positions affect as a kind of embodied ability that art helps its witnesses to fine tune.

O’Sullivan is specifically theorizing visual art, but what happens when I apply his theories to the performing arts, where the artists’ affects (in the Tomkinsian sense) are the very stuff of which the art “object” is composed? Does affect still act as a portal when the art event is not a painting but is itself made up of human beings, such as is the case in theater? Of course it does, but it also complicates an affect theory that seeks to sidestep the more embodied, that is, the human, production of affect.³⁸ If affect creates portals, as O’Sullivan suggests, then in the theater we must be willing to talk about affects as events rooted in human experience that have the potential to allow us (actors, audience members, directors, writers, funders, scholars) to see each other with new eyes; in short, affect in the theater is not a transhuman event but a (potentially) transformative intersubjective encounter. In a sense, the performing arts and performance studies ask the transhuman model of affect to take a fresh look at the Tomkinsian model of affect, the one that posits affect as an event occurring within as well as beyond the human body and psyche. If art helps us to recover the sensation of life, as Shklovsky suggests in the epigraph to this chapter, and if art is a bundle of affects that cannot be read, but only experienced, *sensed*, as O’Sullivan suggests, then can we think of theater – an inherently embodied, social art form – as an event that

³⁸ Geographer Deborah Thien offers a pointed critique of an affect theory situated in transhuman territory. She suggests that the “jettisoning of the term ‘emotion’ in favor of the term ‘affect’ seems compelled by an underlying revisiting, if in a more theoretically sophisticated register, of the binary trope of emotion as negatively positioned in opposition to reason, as objectionably soft and implicitly feminized” (452). Although I do not aim to replace a discussion of affect with one of emotion (I follow Nathanson’s taxonomy in this respect), I do appreciate Thien’s gendered critique of these kinds of affect theorists.

helps us, not to “read” others as though they were texts or objects, but to feel (along with) others, humanizing all participants in the process?

I draw upon all these notions of affect – psychological and sociological models which locate affect in and among human body-minds, and a cultural studies model which attends to affect in transhuman territory – to discuss zAmya’s rehearsals and performances. It is vital to the nature of my research site that I recognize affect as something produced by and in human beings, as a resonator within the body that awakens that body to people and events outside of itself. But I am also interested in the affects emanating from objects and from affects’ abilities to move about a room, to, as ethnographer Kathleen Stewart says, “pick up density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds” (*Ordinary* 3). Geographer Deborah Thien’s definition comes close to capturing what it is I am looking for when she describes affect as the “motion of emotion” (451). But Thien’s definitions of affect and emotion differ from Tomkins’ (again, as articulated by Nathanson, affect is a biological response whereas emotion is a more complex feeling saturated with memory), and in this chapter I am also interested in the “motion” of affect, in Tomkins’ definition of affect as a bolt of feeling that is not cognitive, not controllable, that can be physically sensed as a drop in the pit of the stomach or a speeding of the pulse. These multiple, and often competing, theories of affect frame my investigation of zAmya in the following fashion: primarily, I am interested in the times that affect is triggered in the body (and occasionally the way it is produced by the non-human universe), and the way it travels around the room, causing things to happen. It is these embodied impulses, which are nonetheless events occurring in a circuit of sociality, events which

come from somewhere (are triggered) and travel, and which have real impact upon people and events, that form the very ground of the theatrical event. Secondly, I am interested in the ensuing feelings and emotions that evolve from affects, especially to the extent that those feelings are colonized or to the extent that one is compelled to manage them in order to comply with what Hochschild calls feeling rules or conventions. Attending to feelings in this manner begins to hint at the contours of socializing structures, the forces that determine “what we are supposed to feel” (“Emotion” 572).³⁹

Therefore, in this chapter I trace the movement of affect through zAmya’s rehearsal, performance, and workshop spaces. I begin with a reflection of my own affective impulses, my own desire to fit into zAmya’s rehearsals in some comfortable way, and my ultimate failure to do so. I then discuss some affective circuits I observed among the actors and other members of the creative team in rehearsals, moments which might go unnoticed in other kinds of analyses but which I argue constitute moments of efficacy in the theater space. I also describe affective presence in rehearsal that does not manifest itself as circuits, but does make possible for at least one of zAmya’s actors a kind of agency, based on Patricia Ticineto Clough’s definition of affect as, in part, “the augmentation or diminution of a body’s capacity to act, engage, and to connect. . .”

(2). Following this discussion, I turn from rehearsal to performance to describe some of the affective phenomena I have experienced at zAmya’s shows, in an effort to determine when audiences let affect flow (which often involves them being surprised by

³⁹ Hochschild’s articulation of “feeling rules” also brings to mind Raymond Williams’s notion of “structures of feeling,” which grassroots theater scholar Bruce McConachie paraphrases as “the emotional bonding generated by values and practices shared by a specific group, class, or culture” (36).

the trigger), and when they, as Hochschild describes, manage their emotions. I conclude with another self-reflection about a zAmya workshop scenario, a memory of fear and letting go that begins to describe a theory for intimacy in civically-engaged theater. Ultimately, I seek to prove, following philosopher Agnes Heller, that “to feel means to be involved in something” (*Theory* 11). It is the quality or level of this involvement that I maintain can be used as one of several markers of civically-engaged theater’s efficacy. As I argued in the last chapter, an indication of success in civically-engaged theater is a body that spatializes, that extends into space, claiming it. Likewise, in this chapter I argue that success in civically-engaged theater can be measured by the extent to which actors and audience members participate freely in affective circuits,⁴⁰ rather than engaging in the costly and detrimental act of “managing,” suppressing, or rerouting their feelings in order to survive in capitalist economies.

Feeling in the Way in Rehearsal: An Ethnographer Manages her Emotions

November 10, 2008. It’s nearing the end of the rehearsal period for zAmya’s fifth yearly roadshow, *Little (Foreclosed) House on the (Stolen) Prairie*. At this point in rehearsals, the actors will begin doing run-throughs of the play – there is no audience yet, but it is a transitional time between rehearsal and performance, and as such it carries with it a different feeling than previous rehearsals: there is a little more alertness in the air, a little more on-the-verge-ness. I slip into rehearsal during warm-ups, drop a bowl of chocolates and granola bars to share on one end of a long table, and seat myself

⁴⁰ Or rather, the extent to which participants *feel what they feel* rather than convincing themselves they should feel something more “appropriate” as determined by conventions of feeling. I am not rehearsing a Kantian argument here, privileging autonomy or free will, but suggesting instead that one of the things theater can do is help us loosen the grasp that socialized structures have over the triggering or suppression of affect.

at the other end. I survey the room. This long table I'm sitting behind, which has shown up today for the first time during this rehearsal period, seems to be a vestige from other kinds of theater, "professional" theater – it is replete with clipboards and pencils and a boom box, and with its presence it anchors the somewhat chaotic room. The table lends its feeling of purpose and authority to the room. *Alright then, it seems to say, we've been playing around for about a month, telling stories, experimenting, but now it is time to get serious, to put this play together. People will be watching soon . . .*

Likewise, Josina the stage manager bustles around the room, a little more harried than usual: she sets up some chairs, clears others, fields last-minute questions about blocking and then hurriedly resituates the chairs she just placed. Chairs are just about the only kind of furniture in this room, so they are used aplenty to signify all kinds of places and objects. The chairs are of the fold-up variety, and there are perhaps a hundred of them, identical, in this room, which by day serves as St. Stephen's community room. By night, though, these chairs are transformed in the course of rehearsal – they become construction sites and TV news studios, they populate dearly loved home dwellings and temporary housing shelters, they secure tightrope lines in circuses and mark the entrance to mortgage companies run by maniacal robots. There is a constant oscillation in my perception of these chairs, between the chair's dreary sameness and the imagined worlds they make possible – the chairs seem to resonate simultaneously with two different affects: they embody the annihilating, objectifying drone that all too often characterizes a life spent in emergency housing, of being just one number among many, one more problem to be solved, and also of the joyful, playful prospect of living a humanized life.

Several actors stop by my corner of the table for a visit as they get ready for the run-through. Greg is a middle-aged white man, housed, and this is his first season with zAmya. He brings me a piece of candy, we chat about his job, his past. Turns out he works for a government agency and used to be a dancer. Marvin is younger than Greg, African-American, and is currently living in temporary housing at Salvation Army, Harbor Light. He has experience in stand-up comedy, which he brings, with relish, to his performance in zAmya's shows. Marvin comes over to say thanks for the snacks, but really I think he's flirting a little. Crystal is a white woman, fresh out of college and working in the field of theater for social change as an educator and activist. She stops by to ask about my daughter – I produce a few photos, and we coo together at the chubby six-month-old. I smile and wave across the room to Arminta, an African-American woman, who is pacing at the back of the room, going over lines; the exquisite sound of her humming reaches in wispy tendrils through the space. All these actors, and a handful of others, are getting ready for tonight's run-through, arranging their props, going over lines, reminding themselves of blocking, but also engaging in a little socializing, chatting and connecting with the others in the room. This friendly banter seems to be a requisite part of theater rehearsals, characterizing it not only as an aesthetic space, a space for art-making, but also as a social one.

There is one person in the room, though, who is not running around getting ready or engaging in casual chatter. A friend of Arminta's sits off to the side in a chair, in peaceful contemplation of the room and completely isolated from its activities: Tom is a dainty, older African-American man who always comes to rehearsal wearing a rather elaborate green one-piece snowsuit and a jaunty black turban upon which is

perched a pair of goggles, the kind you wear in a chemistry lab. Tom isn't acting in the play, but he regularly comes along with Arminta and watches. In that sense we have a little something in common. However, Tom seems perfectly happy to sit and watch – he doesn't exhibit any of the anxiety I have over what my role is in the room (more about this in a moment). Tom always seems quite content, even neutral, decidedly de-stressed – if managing emotions gives off some kind of trace or effort, I do not detect any in Tom's demeanor. Why does he come to rehearsal? Perhaps this is the very reason – because he doesn't have to intentionally be anyone or do anything here. Tom's presence in the room reveals the rehearsal space as, ironically, not someplace to put on a mask or "play" a character, but as a place where one is given permission to be who one is in a way which is difficult or impossible outside the rehearsal space.⁴¹ I remember high school students in activist theater teacher Jan Mandell's nationally renowned theater program remarking that the basement (where theater classes were held) was the only place in the school where they could be themselves, thus marking the theater space as a liberatory space, a space to encounter oneself in one's full humanity. This is not to argue for the existence of an essential self or to discredit, for example, Judith Butler's theories which posit identity as a series of stylized performances (Butler 519). What these students' responses, or more to the point, what Tom's behavior makes apparent is the distinction between *feeling*, that is, "giving in" to affective impulses, and *trying to feel*, by which I mean, following Hochschild, trying to comply with dominant conventions of feeling. A dominant convention in the rehearsal space might be a kind

⁴¹ I suspect that any good acting teacher will tell you just this: teaching acting is about teaching students how *not* to act, in other words, how to refuse to manage their emotions and instead be tuned in to and fluidly responsive to the circumstances at hand, including their own affective impulses.

of showy or presentational emoting,⁴² or, in zAmya's theater space specifically, a passionate voicing of a concern for social change. But Tom doesn't engage in either of these behaviors. What is noteworthy about Tom is precisely his lack of performative or emotional labor: in contrast to the rest of us who spend much of our time in the room trying to articulate a role for ourselves, or trying to manage our emotions to fit the "cause," Tom remains seemingly unconcerned with making his mark on the performance at all. And yet he becomes a critical part of the process, a constant witness: later, when I am chatting with him during one of the performances, he confesses that he "could play any role up there." And I believe him – he didn't spend his time in rehearsal trying to play a character or "make change:" Tom's contribution to the project was to show quiet interest, to listen, to see, to remember, to, as Conquergood says, "be impressed" by the Other ("Performance" 149), and in this sense he was just as much a part of the affective circuit in the room as anyone.

As the rehearsal nears its starting time, Maren, zAmya's artistic director, sits down beside me at the official stage manager's table; she chews something and casually watches Josina wrestle chairs around the room. I'm a little surprised by how relaxed Maren seems, because she is often in a state of barely hidden distress throughout the rehearsal period. Maren tends to perform this kind of cosmic patience with actors – she accepts almost any idea that is brought to the process, is unreservedly kind and generous, and goes out of her way to make people feel valued and important to the project. This kind of attitude seems absolutely vital in this space, but it also carries a

⁴² Even when I was an actor, many moons ago, new acquaintances had a hard time believing I was in the theater because I was so quiet, such a wallflower. These responses, as well as my experience with a slew of attention-grabbing actors, leads me to believe that most actors produce this kind of showiness because it seems to be expected of them.

huge cost, which reveals itself sometimes when Maren just lays her head down on the table, or wanders out of the room during thorny debates about the show's content and structure. As opposed to Tom, I think Maren is constantly engaged in managing her emotions. Her responses to questions in rehearsal are always slow, careful, and tender – the result of constant self-reflection. She told me once that she'd rather be mugged than cross the street to move away from someone who looked suspicious or dangerous, and thereby run the risk of offending that person. And so, she gets a little emotionally mugged in rehearsal from time to time, always putting others' needs and feelings ahead of her own.

Maren's vulnerability and subsequent emotional management in rehearsal suggests something that is also implied in Hochschild's example of the airline worker: that emotional management is often a *gendered* issue. Pedagogical theorist Doris Santoro Gómez critiques the notion of student-centered pedagogy as a practice which marginalizes the teacher's role in the educational process, particularly when that teacher is a woman, thereby producing a "pedagogy of disappearance" (316). zAmya pursues a similar model, an actor-centered pedagogy, which is intended to produce a politics of visibility for a population which normally does not enjoy the right to represent themselves. zAmya is committed to providing a space for the actors experiencing homelessness to tell their own stories. However, in the process, Maren's story and labor often go overlooked, often through her very own actions: it is as though she has convinced herself that to structure the work being done by others, or to take credit for the work being accomplished, would be unethical, taking focus away from where it "should" be. Throughout most of the rehearsal process, Maren seems to internalize a

pedagogy of disappearance which complies with an ideological code that naturalizes “woman’s work” without recognizing or rewarding the value of its labor (317).

Complying with this convention, and thereby engaging in emotion management, often interrupts the affective circuits that Maren might otherwise be able to engage in and which I think, personally, would ultimately contribute to a more compelling performance event. Maren is a terrifically talented theater artist, and bringing those skills to the process would, far from obscuring the work of the actors, bring it into relief.

Tonight, though, she runs rehearsal from behind the table, which seems to help her stand her ground; tonight, the actors seek *her* out, asking for guidance and support, and as she speaks to them her voice is sure, direct, louder than usual. Perhaps the table’s sense of purpose is infecting Maren, giving her a kind of rootedness that she normally doesn’t display as she meanders through the rehearsal space for most of the process, giving focus to others.

The table gives me a similar sense of purpose. When I walked into the room that night I was drawn to it. Rather than a portal causing new affective intensities to buzz, like O’Sullivan describes, this connection between myself and the table is an old one, a familiar one – it reminds me of theater spaces I have previously been more comfortable in than zAmya’s. I have tucked myself in at the table behind the enormous boom box: perhaps it is to make myself a little invisible and enact my own pedagogy of disappearance (I remember a directing teacher telling me once that he stayed as still as possible while he was watching actors rehearse, so as not to draw their attention to him while they worked); perhaps it is out of a sense of efficiency, a desire to stay out of the

way while other people are preparing to perform; perhaps I'm drawn to the opportunity to be useful (I can certainly handle cuing up the music, can't I?). Even now, after I've been with zAmya through two rehearsal cycles, I still have a faint sense of not belonging there, of *being in the way*. As opposed to Tom, who seemed to be able to be in the space both without a defined, creative role and without this kind of anxiety, my struggle with this inability to belong in some familiar way had lingered for years. I had tried a number of different ways to assuage, or manage, that anxiety, as I will outline here.

First, because Maren often asked my opinion, usually on the sidelines of rehearsal, I tried for a while to think of myself as an assistant-director. I had a lot of theater knowledge, I told myself, I can do some good here, I can make this acting more precise, I can help these stories be told with more impact. So I tried this route for awhile, mostly reflecting privately with Maren about the rehearsal process, or doing research for the production. But once I went so far as to try and insert myself in the creative direction of a rehearsal. The actors were improvising realist scenes around the topic "causes of homelessness," and kept coming to impasses in the game. One actor would begin by improvising a line that suggested a particular situation or environment, such as "I deal drugs because it is the only way I can make money." The second actor, ideally, should pick up the "cue" and work with the first actor to explore the ramifications of the situation that the first actor had introduced into the game. Inevitably though, at this rehearsal, the second actor would pursue an oppositional agenda: "But dealing drugs gets kids into trouble!" The first actor would retort, "But it's the only thing I'm GOOD AT!!" After a few fiery exchanges like this, with each

actor standing his or her ground on one or another side of an argument, the exercise would slump into extended pauses and shuffling feet as the actors struggled to figure out how to proceed.

As the game progressed, I got frustrated with what I perceived to be a lack of training, a lack I felt I could easily remedy by introducing the notion of “yes, and . . .”, one of the fundamental building blocks of a successful improvisation. So during one of these awkward pauses in the game I asked if could make a suggestion: “Why don’t you try saying ‘yes, and . . .’ before each line,” I offered. “Yes, and . . .”, as I knew from experience, could help the actors accept the circumstances given to them by another actor, and then allow them to build on those circumstances. The actors involved said sure, they would try this method. After two or three exchanges, the phrase abruptly changed to “yes, but . . .”, which in one fell swoop defeats the purpose of the improv technique entirely. I tried coaching them back, squawking “yes, *and* . . .” a few times from the sidelines, but was summarily ignored as the actors surged forth with gusto (“yes, BUU-UUT! . . .”), solidifying the improv game as a test of wills, a rambunctious competition that did little to tease out the multiple, often conflicting, narratives that surround the issue of drug-dealing. I slipped back into silence, feeling rather deflated that I had not been able to make the game more productive or deepen the discussion. I was also ashamed: I had tried to help, and been rejected.

My attempt at making a role for myself as “resident theater expert” had failed, but my desire to mitigate my uneasiness, that is, to find a role for myself in that space, lingered. So, the next year, during the 2008 rehearsal cycle, I decided to release myself from this feeling that I had to contribute advanced knowledge to the process and I

simultaneously gave up the hope of remaining objectively detached from zAmya as a scholar. This allowed me to try on another role: participating more fully in the rehearsal process as an actor/writer. To my sheer delight, I found that whereas my expertise as a theater director went unacknowledged, my willingness to commit my body to the structuring of scenes as an actor was highly valued. Nobody wanted my “help,” which really, after that failed improv game intervention, I realized was a kind of bossiness, or what Buddhists might call grasping, a way of trying to order the experience according to what felt familiar to me. My “helping” and my ensuing sense of shame revealed my desire to have influence in the space, my desire to make my mark on the process. Cultural theorists Margaret Werry and Róisín O’Gorman discuss the potential for shame to reveal a “space of power” in pedagogical contexts (223), and I think it did the same for me in the rehearsal room. It was a painful lesson, but one which made apparent to me a potentially more efficacious goal for civically-engaged theater: instead of the privileged helping the underprivileged, and thus attempting to transform the latter’s situation, what if civically-engaged theater was a forum for the transformation of the privileged and thus, as Paulo Freire remarks in his seminal book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, for the transformation of power relations? What if the goal became to create the conditions for the privileged to enter into the social/theatrical process with a kind of vulnerability and openness to new experiences? What if it became a process of the privileged assuming responsibility for themselves, their own views and actions, rather than the caretaking of others?

So, during the *Little House* rehearsal process I volunteered to write a scene with Greg, whom I mentioned earlier, and Larry, a zAmya veteran. We were given a few

loose parameters and then, through a collaborative process of discussion, game-playing, and rehearsal, we created a scene that revealed the frustrations of trying to navigate the home-buying process. We all brought ideas to the table. Rather than “teaching” the “yes, and . . .”, I made it my goal to *enact* it, to become expansive. Greg and I played robot mortgage brokers who were programmed only to process paperwork and collect fees but did not know how to treat Larry, our customer, as a human being. Greg’s magnificent “paper processing” dance, my deadpan robot monotone, and Larry’s utter bewilderment at finding himself in the surreal world of “Associate Knuckleheads” drew an enthusiastic response when we performed our first version of the scene for the other actors in rehearsal.

I have to admit, it felt good to belong to this project and to receive praise; I liked having a defined role, and I felt less friction, as though I finally fit in. But paradoxically, once I finally felt like I belonged, it also began to occur to me that not having a role, that retaining that sense of uneasiness or dislocation, was a useful thing too. Perhaps my uneasiness about being in the space without a defined role was more a reflection of my past than my present: an indicator that I was edging closer to the outer boundaries of theater as I (previously) knew it. Perhaps it wasn’t that I was in the way at zAmya, but that zAmya was in *my* way, that is, that zAmya was interrupting my thinking about how theater *should* be. This feeling of uneasiness, of dislocation, happened to me as I crossed beyond the limits of a professional theater that excludes ways of working, like devising, or sources of knowledge, like personal narratives, and that strives instead to produce a polished performance object that will sell and that will reassure its patrons of familiar morals. I reflected on how my uneasiness was most

evident when I was trying to “direct” the actors, as during the “yes, and” improvisation intervention. The space itself and its inhabitants were sending me the message that they did not want to be ordered, or rendered more legible, as I was trying to do by instilling more “professional” theater tactics.

So, what would it mean to intentionally not occupy a comfortable role in this space? Rather than parking myself in the familiar task of acting or directing, I began to see the value of *drifting*. Critical cultural theorist and Chicana Chela Sandoval appropriates the notion of drifting from semiotician Roland Barthes: drifting is “not choosing” – drifting confounds binaries, it frustrates the “shoulds,” and it allows reality to retain its ambiguities. In what I perceive as a parallel gesture to Hochschild’s refusal to manage emotions, Sandoval claims that drifting occurs in the face of “the social scripts that name, drive, and impel us . . .” (*Methodology* 143). Sandoval uses Barthes’ drifting to postulate a type of oppositional consciousness she calls “differential,” a notion she has derived from observing women of color enact opposition during the U.S. feminist movement(s) during and since the 1970s (“they seem to shift from one type of women’s group to another, and another,” remembers Sandoval). Differential consciousness allows the activist to move among and pick and choose resistances, “shatter[ing] the construction of any one ideology as the single most correct site where truth can be represented” (58, 59). And indeed, this gesture of mobility is evident at zAmya, from the project’s traveling to various sites in the workshop phase to collect stories, to the performance’s highly polyphonic character, to the fluidity of roles assumed during the creative process, where an actor moves flexibly between performing, writing, critiquing, and witnessing in rehearsal. Additionally, the mobility

which saturates the practices of the project reflects the enforced mobility of those experiencing homelessness as they traverse the city by day and rest in temporary housing or on the streets by night.

So, inspired by Chela Sandoval's differential consciousness, and as a way to show my alliance with those experiencing homelessness, I also chose drifting as my *modus operandi* during rehearsal. I tried to not rest comfortably in a familiar role, and opted instead to occupy different positions – to witness the process, as Tom had taught me, quietly, by example; to contribute to the project's creation, as I did with Greg and Larry in the robot scene; and as I will show later, to root tirelessly for the beautiful moments of connection that happened in rehearsal, as well as to critique the project when it has failed its participants. Drifting in this way, I embraced the initial sense of dislocation I had in rehearsal as a useful feeling, realizing, in fact, that it is perhaps the thing which could connect me most intimately to the event.

Affective Circuits in Rehearsal: Productive Portals

So there I am, last November 10th, sitting behind the boom box in rehearsal, thinking about how I fit in to the space or not, and how that feeling of dislocation offers a tiny realm of slippage through which to see anew the processes of theater-making and sociality. The rest of the actors coast the room, preparing for the run-through. Big Daddy, Darrell, Esther, Ed, Corey. Some stretching, some finishing up phone calls, some snacking. We are all on the sidelines, sidling around or hunkering down in front of a great gap of empty space in the middle of the room: the performance space. I am reminded of a space I mentioned in chapter one, the medieval Italianate *mundus*, the

womb-like space of death and transcendence, a passageway to the underworld, to layers of meaning and existence not thought possible above ground, a place where those cast off by society are thrown, but also a part of the earth's body that re-members (Lefebvre 242). And indeed, this rehearsal space we occupy is below ground, a basement community room at St. Stephen's Catholic Church. A deep, personal, and salvific religion pervades this space, as it does many of the participants' narratives which make up the fabric of the shows performed here. The very name of the project, zAmya, is a Sanskrit word which means "aiming toward peace." Could this performance space, this large abyss of potentialities, be functioning as what Lefebvre called an absolute space, religious and political, one which preserves unmediated relationships (48)? The actors scuttle around the borders of this wide open space of possibility, awaiting its beckoning to enter. There is some nervousness in the room which, at first glance, I take for anxiety over the upcoming run-through: What is my blocking in scene three? Will I remember that long monologue? Where did I put that prop? But perhaps the actors are also a bit leery of what they will find in that mundus, the space-time of performance, what part of themselves the event will re-member. For isn't theatrical performance ideally a space which restores the link between affective triggers and their expression, instead of a space which promotes emotion management, that is, the suppression of affect or the evocation of "masking" emotions?

Maren cuts through the bustle of the room with her voice: "We'll take it from Arminta's entrance," she decides. There is a hush. We wait a long moment. Finally, Arminta tentatively whispers from the back of the room, "You gonna count it out, Maren?" Arminta's request marks her desire, but for what? For permission? For

introduction? For inspiration? I'm not sure, but it's clear that her request connected her to Maren in some way, and that connection is what permitted the performance to begin. The request takes Maren by surprise, then excites her, and like a grand conductor she rhythmically bellows out: "One, two, three, ACTION!" Maren's words, prompted by Arminta's request, work like a key, providing the necessary ritual to open up the space of the performance, and sweeping everyone into a different frame of mind and feeling, transforming the quality of our attention. Arminta sways into the open space, singing a glorious gospel hymn, her rough, lovely voice filling the room with praise. She is singing her character into being. Arminta's song works as a trigger for the affective continuum interest-excitement: we all fall silent and draw close, the other actors tucking in behind the floor to ceiling columns that encircle the performance space and which suddenly bestow upon it a feeling of grandeur. What becomes immediately apparent in this scenario is what Tomkins describes as the "extreme stickiness" of the affect interest (71), the way our witnessing bodies are drawn closer to Arminta's singing and swaying, the heightened perception, or reception, that is made possible by this affective connection, the very real sense of being in the middle of an *event*, of existing fully and consciously in the present moment. As has happened to me before watching singers in performance, I feel instantly *awake*, receptive, open. A friction-less portal has opened between the art event, in this case, the artist, and the witnesses.

Arminta finishes singing and begins the first monologue of the play. As though a spell has been broken, most of the actors drift to the back of the room and engage in other activities as the rehearsal progresses. But one actor, Ed, remains nearby, sitting at the edge of the performance space with a script in hand. With his eyes he traces

Arminta's monologue in his pages, a small smile on his face, nodding her on. The iron-clad constancy of his support is palpable, a thin rope of attention connecting him to Arminta. Arminta forgets a line and breaks character, "*help me*" she whispers quietly, desperately, reaching out, and Ed is right there to prompt her next line in a soft voice. Arminta's fear was quite sincere, reflecting the pressures of live performance, especially the actor's paradox which is to know the events of the play and yet still to seem surprised when they arise. Especially in our contemporary culture, we are trained to try to mask our fear, to not appear vulnerable, to act self-sufficient. But in the theater space, Arminta's affect, fear, which was triggered by not remembering her next line, was allowed to be expressed. Arminta didn't have to manage or mask her fear, she could voice it, she could be vulnerable, she could ask for help. And Ed picked up on her affect, responded to it, and thus transformed it with the action of prompting her next line. These two gestures embedded Ed and Arminta in an affective circuit, one which was both produced by the conditions of performance and allowed the run-through to proceed.

This affective circuit is part of what I am arguing qualifies civically-engaged theater as efficacious. It is not only that Arminta can allow her affect fear to find expression, but also that Ed can "hook into" it and respond with his own affective expression. When Ed comes to this theater project, I think he does so because it offers him the space to experience a *feeling* that he might not experience elsewhere, a feeling of being generous and useful, triggered by the affects of interest and joy. It's too bad that capitalism has appropriated this feeling to promote the circulation and accumulation of commodities, because I think that feeling of being useful is one of the

most satisfying human feelings to experience (and, thus, I suppose that is why dominant space uses it to colonize our time). Feeling useful implies a being-toward, a particular kind of relationality. The usefulness felt at zAmya and other civically-engaged theaters, though, is a usefulness undervalued in many other social spaces: the usefulness generated by creating art, the usefulness of speaking and witnessing personal stories, the usefulness of play. zAmya turns the idea of usefulness on its head, revealing talents in people that go unnoticed elsewhere. Ed's keeping book for Arminta with such steadfastness, such generous interest, is an affect embodied specifically by this space and the possibilities it creates for collaborative sociality. The art-making process can interrupt the behavior produced by being in survival mode (and I would argue that it is not just those experiencing homelessness who occupy survival mode during the day – think of Hochschild's airline worker). Ed releases himself from survival mode by practicing an ethics of care toward the other participants, in the way he keeps book for Arminta. And this affect is contagious – I observe Ed's steadfastness, and it rubs off on the way I see the performance: I give my own reception to Arminta with increased attention, with hope, by relishing the moments of connection she makes to the text, by making myself available as an audience member to be marked and moved by this encounter, by allowing myself to be completely deluged by her ethereal song. I become the performance's ardent cheerleader and eager witness, drawn in to the affective circuit set into play.

And the affective circuit continues travelling beyond this moment. In a later rehearsal, Ed says a line during the course of a run-through which is completely inaudible. Maren can't help herself. She interrupts the rehearsal and giggles, "What

was that?” and her giggling is infectious: we all sort of erupt. Ed is left looking a bit exposed, a little wide-eyed as he searches for a reply – did he mumble because he couldn’t remember a line? Corey, with a wide smile, calls out from the other side of the room “It was PERSONAL!” How easily Corey could have giggled along with the rest of us, leaving Ed in the vulnerable position of defending his actions. But instead he reached out and drew Ed back in to the circle of camaraderie. Ed’s little paralysis ebbed, he laughed at Corey’s joke (“Yeah, it was personal!” he tosses back at Maren), and the rehearsal proceeded. And on and on . . .

These little gestures of interested support and generosity. In my experience (and I want to be clear about how subjective these comments are) they happen with great frequency in theater rehearsals. Why is that? I don’t want to idealize the rehearsal space, or suggest that generosity doesn’t occur elsewhere, but there is something about the performance-making process, especially one which requires such vulnerability from its participants, that tends to compel this kind of support to take place. As a response to the ethos of autonomy and self-sufficiency promoted by a capitalist economics, Ed’s relationship to Arminta, in that moment of keeping book, generates a kind of affective commons,⁴³ a moment where Ed’s attention and energy directly benefit Arminta and, by extension, contribute to the abundance of the collective performance “fund.” But Ed’s act of attentiveness benefits him too, contributing to a sense of usefulness, of purpose, and one which does not exist solely to enrich the cycle of accumulation in capitalist

⁴³ As discussed in chapter one, a commons is theorized by Gibson-Graham as “a source of funds for sustaining and expanding the community of cooperators while at the same time contributing to individual wealth through the payment of interest on personal accounts” (125). Although conceived by Gibson-Graham in economic terms, I am here appropriating the vocabulary of the commons to describe the affective relationality of the collaborative theater event.

space. These affective moments, in fact, constitute the civically-engaged theater rehearsal as resistant to capitalist space, as a marginal space which simultaneously refuses to engage in the circulation of commodities⁴⁴ and also counteracts the debilitating effects of what I've been calling "survival mode," which for some describes life on the streets or the path, the endless routine of traversing the city in search of food, shelter, medical services, and community. When the "currency" circulating through an event is affective flow and expression, new relational patterns are created: the cost of "buying in" to this event, one constituted by freely expressed affective impulses, is merely to participate, to let go of the desire to manage emotions.

The unique nature of theater's efficacy, I think, lies in these little affective moments like the one I witnessed between Ed and Arminta, moments which resist the ethos of the market (that of buying and selling) and instill new relational practices. The meaning in that moment between Ed and Arminta was constituted largely through affect, through the way a vulnerability was exposed, a need voiced and then met with gentle, undemanding support, in the manner that both participants brought themselves to the project at hand. Ed's kindness to Arminta in that moment became absorbed into the history of Arminta's character – there is no way around it: energy does not disappear, it just changes forms. As Arminta opened up her being ("*help me*") to accept this gift from Ed, the interaction changed them both, extending the contours of their subjectivities. That affect became an invisible part of Arminta's performance, and this was later passed on to the audience, morphing once again during the new exchange. This travelling circuit of tenderness echoes the outside world as an absence, a gap, in

⁴⁴ This is a claim which becomes complicated when we get to performance, as I will discuss in later sections of this chapter.

market relations, a tenderness excised and dumped into the *mundus*. These moments of affect that break through the boundaries of the possible (as legitimated by dominant space), that produce what Simon O’Sullivan calls a portal, are the very ground of a resistant civically-engaged theater practice.

Transitioning to Performance: Conventions of Feeling Exposed

Despite zAmya’s multiple successes at producing the conditions for affective circuits to flow, it is not a utopia; it is a real and multifaceted social space. Whereas I suggested in the last section that the affective circuit that developed with such kindness between Ed and Arminta constitutes a moment of efficacy, there are many other kinds of affective presence in the room as well. In this section, I’ll describe some effective and affective connections in rehearsal that are not so “feel good,” as well as times when affective circuits are interrupted, or when affective impulses/expressions are replaced by what Hochschild calls emotion management, that costly work of *trying* to feel what one is supposed to feel. These latter examples begin to make themselves apparent, perhaps not accidentally, as the process shifts from rehearsal to performance.

Recognizing the act of emotion management that occurs in this transition can begin to reveal some of the dominant ideological structures which hold sway even in this theater space which attempts to excavate and resist ideological pull.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Following Hochschild, I am using ideology here to mean that system of beliefs which informs our actions and behavior often without our knowing why we follow it. In this chapter I’m especially interested in ideology as a set of frames which dictates what we “ought to” feel, and which often reveals itself as “common sense” or “the obvious choice.” In this sense, it resonates with Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*, described thusly: “The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reasoning or signifying intent, to be none the less ‘sensible’ and ‘reasonable’” (*Outline* 79).

Shortly after I notice Ed keeping book for Arminta during that work-through, a few other actors set up something of a competing performance site in the back of the room. Momentarily uninterested by the rehearsal in process, Marvin begins an exuberant monologue, accompanied by Crystal as comic sidekick, and replete with joking, laughing, and all manner of attention-grabbing gestures. After a few moments, they are shushed by the stage manager. It is unusual – I have never seen someone disciplined in this space before. Marvin apologizes immediately, but soon enough he and Crystal are reengaged in an energetic chatter that works like a magnet, drawing other waiting actors over to them and away from attention to the work-through taking place, primarily with Arminta, in the stage area. This is another affective circuit at work – the waiting actors act upon their affect interest-excitement, which is triggered not by the somewhat tedious work being done on stage, but the much more entertaining routine being enacted impromptu by Marvin and Crystal at the back of the room.

Part of what is present in Marvin and Crystal's behavior is that the actors are, as just mentioned, transitioning from rehearsal to performance. This rehearsal is a work-through, meaning that the goal is to do a run-through of the entire script, but that inevitably there will be stops and starts as Maren helps the actors finesse the blocking and remember lines in order to finalize what will ultimately be the show they perform for the audience. The actors are getting ready to be seen – although this brought a certain amount of trepidation to Arminta and her concerns about knowing her lines, I think it evokes a different response in Marvin and Crystal: excitement! Both Marvin and Crystal are experienced performers, and I sense in their competing performance site

at the back of the room a real exuberance as they anticipate the upcoming opening night, and a chance to share their labor and their talents with audiences.

Crystal's exuberance is also accompanied by a kind of restlessness. She mentions later that she needs more to do, as she quickly volunteers to be in a scene in which she was not previously cast. Her impulse to *do something* in this space is almost dominating, very visible and audible; this affect spreads through the space in her continual efforts to organize bodies, stories, and space – I'll return to this in the next chapter in my discussion of the narrative act. Although the desire to be purposeful infiltrates both Ed and Crystal's existence at zAmya, those desires manifest in decidedly different ways, which may have something to do with their differing biographies. Ed has experienced a lengthy homelessness, and has told me in interviews that his focus in rehearsal is always on the future performance – he believes the efficacy of performance lies in its ability to provoke empathy, its ability to “move people.” This focus is evident in moments like his keeping book for Arminta, where Ed is contributing labor which will ultimately make the performance better. Crystal's sense of purposefulness is, I believe, profoundly influenced by the desire to help, to do good, to effect social change. Crystal is housed, educated, and works in a high school teaching students theater for social change techniques. Crystal's motivation for being a part of zAmya is clearly impelled by her distress about social injustice and wanting the world to be a better place. Her distress, and its accompanying feeling of helplessness, is another affect which is allowed expression at zAmya. But whereas Ed believes the performance *is* effecting social change, Crystal has her doubts. During one feedback session in an earlier rehearsal this year, I remember her worrying that the theater work alone was not

doing enough to effect real change in the lives of its participants. Helplessly, she exclaimed, “What do we do after the show – go get a sub?” Crystal was expressing a frustration that the show wasn’t doing enough to solve the problem of homelessness, and that the privileged participants who attended the show or were involved with its creation were left with no recourse after the performance except to return to the status quo. This feeling that *we are just not doing enough* seems to pervade the consciousness of many of the privileged involved in social justice work. And these are important impulses to feel, and to express – they produce real energy which motivates many of the people involved in the project. More importantly, these feelings of frustration are often an example of refusing to engage in emotion work, that is, refusing to feel good about the theater event just because one “ought to” (Hochschild “Emotion” 565).

But I also wonder, conversely (and perhaps simultaneously), if that drive to *do something* might obscure what *is* actually happening in rehearsal, what *is* successful about civically-engaged theater. Perhaps Crystal’s actions within the theater space are motivated by a desire for zAmya to function more like Boal’s legislative theater (this, in itself, could be considered a kind of dominant convention among social-change theater practitioners). But I wonder if zAmya’s efficacy might not be more suitably assessed along a different model. That is, the show may not be “solving” homelessness, but the affective circuits such as those between Ed and Arminta *are* productive elements of the theatrical process. Because Ed recognizes the value of this affective circuit, he, unlike Crystal, deems the work successful. I agree with him: when affects are felt and expressed, rather than managed, these are moments which mark the civically-engaged theater process as, at least temporarily, efficacious – the theater work is itself “social

change” if it allows affects to be felt and expressed, and to operate in circuits, rather than be suppressed or rerouted. So in this sense, *both* Ed/Arminta’s affective circuit described earlier and Crystal’s voicing of her frustration illustrate moments of efficacy in the theater rehearsal, times when the participants refused to engage in emotion management.

Marvin is another actor with a complicated affective presence. If affect is something that travels around the room and causes things to happen, as Stewart has remarked, then Marvin is a constant initiator of affective triggers, lobbing them into the space almost continuously. He is a talented improviser and stand-up comic, and this carries over into his everyday life; in the example I just mentioned, his “performance” at the back of the room with Crystal nearly trumped the work-through taking place on stage. Marvin spent a year in temporary housing upon moving to Minneapolis during the 2008 road show, but has since (fall 2009) secured permanent housing, so he has great facility moving between and speaking to those two kinds of life experience. Marvin also has a huge personality, is a very precise comic, and has a real talent for grabbing the audience’s attention. With his constant pop culture references (including the perennial favorite, his Bill Cosby imitation) and topical references thrown in improvisationally during performances, Marvin blurs the boundary between amateur and professional, between “activist” performer and mainstream entertainer.

When I really stop to think about Marvin’s presence in the room, though, I don’t think he is actually engaging in affective *circuits*. He produces a lot of stimulating affective triggers – audiences really “light up” when he is on stage, smiling and sitting up straighter, leaning in to hear jokes – but he seems to be working solo most of the

time. Is Marvin engaged in emotion management? I'll point to two examples of why I think so. First, although usually his participation in the shows is brazenly comic, he gave a monologue in the 2009 show that was much gentler, in which he reflected on his mother's death and a promise he made to her before she died. But even this monologue felt "prepared" – even though its emotional tenor was quieter, it didn't have the raw, vulnerable quality of the accounts given by some of the other actors in the group. Secondly, during talkbacks after the 2008 show, Marvin on two consecutive nights explained his journey from Chicago to Minneapolis and through a stay in temporary housing – curiously, the second night's story was almost verbatim for the first. Even though the talkbacks are impromptu events, Marvin's participation felt rehearsed, prepared. Even in my personal conversations with Marvin, I feel as though I'm watching a very skilful, controlled performance. In the 2009 show, another character calls Marvin out for using humor as a shield, as a way to distance himself from the pain in his life. This use of humor is another example of what Hochschild calls emotion management, a tactic Marvin employs to orchestrate his responses to people and events around him. Even during the delicate monologue he gave about his mother in the 2009 show, Marvin was engaged in emotion management, in ordering and presenting his feelings according to prevailing conventions about how one "ought to" feel and act when discussing the death of a loved one. Later in the chapter I will theorize Marvin's behavior as a resistant gesture, as an intentional demand to be included in a dominant gaze which tends to overlook him. However, I first feel compelled to make this pointed critique: if I'm using affective *circuits* as a marker of zAmya's success, as I did with Ed and Arminta, then I must conclude, in Marvin's case, that zAmya has failed; Marvin's

affective response is as carefully managed inside the rehearsal space, and certainly in the performance space, as it is outside.

As is evident from these observations, it is not merely that the housed manage their feelings and those experiencing homelessness participate in affective circuits, affecting and being affected by others in the group. It is of course much more complicated, and all the members of the group, homeless or housed, alternate between participating in circuits and managing emotions. Crystal does not expose herself in the same way Arminta does, expressing her fear and asking for help with a line, but she does freely feel and voice her distress about social injustice and her frustration with her own inability to do anything tangible to help. Marvin produces a tremendous number of affective triggers, but is rarely surprised by his own affective responses, or at least, rarely expresses such surprise – Marvin’s is a studied response to the world held at a distance. Marvin certainly participates in intellectual circuits, but rarely in affective ones.

If the rules for managing feelings (the rules which dictate what we ought to feel) reflect, as Hochschild suggests, the “‘bottom side’ of ideology” (“Emotion” 566), then Marvin’s participation in zAmya implies not that this is some utopian space where the outside world has no sway, but in fact that ideological apparati can still hold some very real claims on the bodies that inhabit this example of civically-engaged theater. Hochschild is especially interested in ideology to the extent that it provides an “interpretive framework” which ascribes meaning to social situations and which prescribes “guidelines for the assessment of fits and misfits between feeling and situation” (566). I’ll use the rest of this section to describe a series of scenes from the

2008 show which depict the ways in which the actors (most notably Ed and Marvin) alternately resist and comply with ideologically structured “conventions of feeling.” This analysis also takes into account the affective potential of objects in performance. I discuss the structure of the story, its performance in front of an audience, and the way it was rehearsed, and so will try to differentiate each manifestation as I go along.

The scenes I will discuss from the 2008 road show are set in Bling-Bling Brothers Three Ring Circus, a fantasia replete with calliope music and an enthusiastic ringmaster. In the script, the three scenes serve as an interlude in the middle of a more realistically conceived story about a neighborhood dealing with gentrification. In the first “ring” or scene of the circus sequence, Corey, a housed, African-American professional actor who has been with zAmya since its inception, walks the tightrope as he attempts to secure a mortgage. Ed and Marvin, playing the two Dangers as though they were in a hilarious send-up of a medieval morality play, embody events that have caused Corey’s credit score to fall: “Credit cards at a young age! Injured on the job! Missed a credit card payment!” Marvin and Ed holler as they rush past Corey, causing him to totter as he travels across the tightrope. With a final exuberant flourish, Ed and Marvin scream “Completely broke!” and “TERRIBLE CREDIT RATING!” and succeed in knocking Corey off the tightrope to his doom below. Miraculously though, Corey survives, dusts himself off, and in the second circus ring faces a knife throwing act where, this time, the knives represent blows to Corey’s ability to maintain good credit. The Dangers yell, “Child support! Laid off from his job! Decides to rob a bank!” as they wildly fling at Corey’s head, not deftly sharpened knives, but plastic spoons, which Ed produced from his bulging pockets in the first rehearsal this scene

was created. The third and final ring of the circus is a lion act. Marvin and Ed come on wearing plumed feline half-masks, like Halloween revelers. Marvin roars ferociously and Ed meows timidly and scratches a chair like a domesticated tabby, then they devour Corey, who, finally bested by the Dangers, has been robbed of his chance at homeownership and carted off to the hospital to have his head reattached.

There are a number of observations to be made about the affect flowing through the circus scenes. To begin by hearkening back to the cultural studies theory of affects which emanate from objects, I'll point out that in the knife throwing act, the plastic cutlery used was produced in the first rehearsal from Ed's pockets, which are always full to bursting with items collected from his sojourn through the city of Minneapolis during the day. These objects not only document Ed's (past) movement through space, but they can also serve to disrupt the (present) spaces he enters, as when he went with Lecia and some of the other zAmya actors to a Guthrie Theater performance with a steak bone in his pocket. Lecia cornered him at intermission: "Ed, what's with the bone." "Well," replied Ed without missing a beat, "it comes in handy if I've got a bone to pick." Ed's response to Lecia could be considered an example of Chela Sandoval's meta-ideologizing, a resistant tactic in the arsenal of the oppressed where an alternative signification is used to "reveal, transform, or disempower its [dominant ideology's] signification . . ." (109). I love this image of Ed calmly disrupting the civility expected at the monstrously contemporary, squeaky clean Guthrie theater building by bringing inappropriate objects in with him, stashed in his pockets. His cool demeanor, though, is also an example of Ed refusing to engage in emotion management – certainly, according to conventions of feeling, one should feel embarrassed about carrying a steak bone

about in one's pocket. But Ed didn't. Why? Perhaps his lengthy homelessness has re-prioritized his sense of decorum (another "should") – what is important to him is hanging on to objects that might be useful later, and his pockets are his only storage facilities. Ed (and his steak bone?) gaze at the Guthrie with bare attention, denaturalizing it – Ed's presence turns that building from an entertainment palace frequented largely by upper-middle class patrons into mere shelter, questioning the practice of spending so many millions on a theater building while people like Ed live in temporary housing.

Ed's plastic spoons perform a similar disruptive function in the Bling Bling Brothers knife-throwing scene. In performance, the scene was always received well: audiences loved the elaborate presentation of the "weapons," the mock fear in Corey's eyes as he was sliced and diced, and Darrell the Ringmaster's wry accompanying comments ("Just a flesh wound!" Darrell would proclaim in his best Monty Python imitation, heightening the absurdity of Corey's quest for homeownership through his intertextual reference). The spoons themselves produced a series of different responses in the performance's witnesses. The audience members who were seeing the show for the first time tended to have an *affective* response to the spoons: laughter, produced by the surprised delight in the use of such a flimsy object to represent such a dangerous weapon. Those of us who knew they were Ed's spoons, though, had an *emotional* response to them. As per Nathanson's definitions, we still experienced the more guttural affective trigger that new audience members had, but that response was also enriched by our memories of Ed first producing the spoons from his pocket, and we

were proud of the ingenuity of this gesture of poor theater, of using what was at hand to make art.

In performance, the spoons from Ed's pocket also create a surprising circuit or portal between the real lives of the participants and the world imagined by the script/ing. The spoons flung at Corey extend Ed's body out into the space of performance and narrative, helping Ed claim space through things and actions. As opposed to a performance convention which asks the actor to put aside his body/history in favor of the character's, the knife-throwing scene foregrounds the actor's own lived experience: a practice acquired by living in homelessness, that of hanging on to and storing items (steak bones, plastic cutlery) which are thrown away by the housed. What is deemed useless (or alternatively, fetishized) by dominant ideologies or thrown away in dominant space (the story of a person experiencing homelessness, a *disposable* spoon) is transformed into something useful, even prized, at zAmya. The newly experienced usefulness of the spoons, the stories, and by extension, the valuing of the storytellers, then contributes to a critique of the ideological structures (structures which impel most people to unquestioningly value financial autonomy and housed-ness) which deemed those objects and those bodies *useless* in the first place. The revealing of structures which cause a population to value housedness are not, initially, spelled out for the audience in a discursive way, though. They manifest themselves, in the first instance, as an affective circuit (more in Stewart's sense than in Tomkins'), a connection between Ed and me, an audience member, via his spoons. I can't speak for other audience members, but for me, the spoons provoked an act of defamiliarization, a double-takerevealing the way our culture produces a trail of disposable objects and

people by placing a premium on the quest for financial autonomy at any cost⁴⁶ – I looked at both the spoons and Ed’s body with fresh eyes, both existing as simultaneously detritus and critique of capitalistic enterprise during this segment of the circus scene.⁴⁷

Similarly, another of the ideological structures hinted at during this show, which had primarily to do with the foreclosure crisis, was an underlying racism in the mortgage industry (and the global financial sector more broadly), and the way it led to so many Latino and African American families being duped into signing mortgage agreements they could barely understand, or agreeing to loan terms that were unsustainable, or finally just being denied funding to buy a home – this was a strong impetus for the creation of Corey’s character in the play. During a later scene where he tries to secure a mortgage and is denied, Corey asks, “Why me? Why can’t I get a mortgage?” The question shocks the audience into seeing Corey’s black skin with fresh eyes – in Stewart’s sense of an affect as something which travels through a room, causing things to happen, Corey’s question is an affective trigger which deepens the observer’s semiotic reading of the theatrical moment. Ideally, this encounter would persuade the audience to self-reflexively examine either how their own participation in the economy may be contributing to Corey’s character’s inability to get a loan, or how

⁴⁶ The double-take is, in fact, a triple affective response: weak interest, which produces startle-surprise, followed quickly by sustained interest (Tomkins 69).

⁴⁷ Ed has spoken to me on occasion about his frustration with social service industries in Minneapolis, who pride themselves on their progressive stance but in fact make it difficult for those experiencing homelessness to access services because they are so spread out over the city. This, in turn, might suggest a deeper critique of the way federal funds are or are not distributed to states so that they may support the kinds of programs which serve people like Ed, or the way heads of businesses make their wealth on the backs of minimum wage employees who are one medical tragedy away from homelessness, or the way neighborhoods are gentrified, dislocating low income residents, etc etc. The disposable spoon flung at Corey’s head, though, makes this entire critique evident in a single poetic gesture.

their own marginal cultural positioning, like that of Corey's character, may be limiting their chances at fair treatment in the mortgage industry. Either way, the moment is successful if it causes the audience to either heighten awareness of or feel differently about familiar events or people, if, as O'Sullivan says, it switches the intensive register.

I remember when I first heard Corey say this line, *why me?*, my affective impulse (this time in the Tomkinsian sense) was fear, a drop in the pit of my stomach, a feeling of dread that I was unwittingly responsible and that I perpetuated this kind of racism through my own housing choices, through my own decision to pay a monthly rent which competitively excluded certain populations from my neighborhood. This fear led me to embark upon my own journey of self-examination, one which included signing a lease with my husband for an apartment in a mixed-income housing complex, an organization which functioned as a kind of commons, where our higher monthly rent would help subsidize the rents of other lower-income tenants, largely people of color, in the same complex. Although we were never able to move into that apartment (my husband, like so many others, was laid off in 2009, compelling us to move to another state closer to family and with a lower cost of living), the encounter I had with Corey's performance opened me up to considering alternative housing choices, ones which not only shelter me but also benefit my neighbors. But, importantly, these changes began with a simple affect, a biological response which the performance both produced and gave me license to pay attention to, to feel rather than manage, and which ultimately caused me to engage in new seeing. I think this is what Shklovsky means when he says that art helps us recover the sensation in life – art gives us permission to *feel*, and these feelings tune us in to the world around us.

So far, I have shown how Ed's spoons represented the affective potential of objects in performance and how Corey's probing question, *why me?*, allowed me to resist emotion management as an audience member. To finish this section I would like to highlight a few conventions of feeling the circus scenes reveal, largely through the last scene, the lion act, which makes visible an interesting relational practice foregrounded in the script: Marvin *always* assumed the superior position in the Dangers duo. The circus scenes were created through improvisation around a loose set of themes (this is the way zAmya usually devises). This means that decisions about character are often made on the fly, in the performances created impromptu in rehearsal. Michael Rohd calls this performance research: a way of exploring themes or material by acting or improvising through them, rather than by (initially) talking through them. During this particular instance of performance research, Marvin and Ed, as the Dangers, hierarchized themselves quickly, probably without discussion. Because these character choices were made without a lot of planning, I am suggesting that I can use them to point to particular conventions or habits of feeling at work (often invisibly) in the rehearsal space. As a reminder, the character choices made were as follows. In the first ring, Ed's clown was a shy and bumbling showgirl who "broke character" to wave and grin at the audience while Marvin's heroic clown performed daring barrel jumps with a hula hoop. In the second ring, Marvin's knife throwing was proficient, powerful, whereas Ed's was timid and often missed its target. And then in the third ring, Ed's lion was a sweet, tame pussy cat, whereas Marvin's was a fierce wildcat, who, during one performance, escaped into the audience and scared a nice old lady.

Why was Marvin's character always the stronger of the pair, and Ed the weaker?

I ask this question not because I can answer it with any definitiveness, but in order to speculate about the ideological claims (that is, the conventions of feeling) upon the actors' bodies, or the interpretive frameworks the actors might be drawing on to create the performance. I suspected that Marvin's bold, showy performance resulted from a desire to have eyes on him at all time, to receive praise, and I wondered whether this was a desire produced by dominant space. When actors experiencing homelessness tell housed audience members to look them in the eye on the sidewalk, I wondered if this was Marvin's way of demanding to be included in that glance, of defying the convention which causes housed people to avert their eyes when they encounter a person experiencing homelessness on the sidewalk. What I earlier theorized as Marvin's constant emotion management might, in this reading, serve to name a resistant gesture, a demand to not be overlooked by the dominant gaze. This "acting up" and "stealing attention" might be Marvin's way of confirming his own existence within public space, and perhaps that is why this behavior surfaced even more conspicuously in the rehearsals right before performances began, in that transitional time when the actors were collectively getting ready to be seen by audiences. If affect describes the body's ability to act, as Clough says, then Marvin's behavior in these scenes as well as in the previous rehearsals is intensely affective, resonating with agency and presence.

I also wondered if Ed's sliding into the weaker role had anything to do with the way he kept book so kindly for Arminta, and if assuming the "weaker" role, that is, the supportive role, is a talent that reveals itself and is valorized while working on theater. But I also wondered if anyone besides me paid attention to Ed while Marvin was

performing such entertaining characters, or if Ed cared. Ed used to say that there was reverse discrimination in the shelter system (Ed is the only white actor experiencing homelessness in this zAmya production), and I wondered if the relational practice and affective structure that emerged in this scene echoed Ed's shelter experience. The white, male body has traditionally been an emblem of power in our culture: does this ideology frame Ed's body as well? Is Ed's white skin more visible in this space than his poverty? Is the semiotic contradiction contained within his body, an educated white man experiencing homelessness, too complicated to deal with and thus overlooked? Again, I can't be sure exactly how these character decisions were made in the performance research phase of the devising process, but Ed told me that the 2009 show was the one where he felt most connected to his role, and that in previous years his character has had lines that he, Ed, wouldn't say or think in "real life." The circus scene was part of one of these previous years, the 2008 show: could Ed's characterization of the weaker role in the circus scene be a case of Ed attempting to adhere to (or being compelled to adhere to) a convention of feeling, one unique to a marginalized space such as a theater produced by people experiencing homelessness, that privileges the bodies of people of color over white bodies?

I also wondered about what conventions of performance were revealed by the circus scenes. Marvin was a terrific actor in these scenes, the way anyone who frequents the Guthrie or other mainstream theater might describe good acting: he was committed to his choices, he was funny and original and fearless. But what did that do to Ed, and the other two actors in the scene, Corey and Darrell? Did it create an atmosphere of competition? Did Marvin rehearse a standard borrowed from dominant

performance traditions that the other actors felt they had to match? Marvin is an experienced actor and improviser, and I wondered if this sort of “professional” activity, while it makes the performance entertaining, might actually be detracting from the way a commons is created in rehearsal. Marvin is a star performer, hugely talented, but does the star system lend itself to collaborative creation?⁴⁸

The circus scene reveals the flow of affect as theorized from numerous perspectives: it depicts the way affect emanates from objects, such as Ed’s spoons, and the way that affect reveals the conditions which produced the object; it shows how affect works as a portal between art event and witness which, as O’Sullivan says, causes the witness to engage in new seeing, such as my own reflection on my housing choices; and it also illustrates the way that affect can be derived from relational structures, such as the hierarchy established between Ed and Marvin, and the way that affect may reveal conventions of feeling within a particular social space. The last part of this section, my purely speculative musings about the relationship between Ed and Marvin, also served to foreground the dynamic and open-ended nature of affective flow – not only can I not answer any of the questions I posed about that relationship with much definitiveness, but I hope to create a space of wonder in the reader of this dissertation as well, the beginning of a dialogue. I have been focusing mostly on the affect produced by and engaged between actors and, to a certain extent, myself as a specialized audience member. In this next section, I’ll shift my focus to the audiences proper, and make

⁴⁸ It is also possible that Marvin’s tendency to polarize the space is paved by Maren’s more permissive facilitation style – in chapter five I will further discuss the effects of this kind of actor-centered philosophy by drawing on Doris Santoro Gómez’s critique of student-centered pedagogy.

some observations about the conventions of feeling which might dictate their engagement with zAmya's performances.

Audience Participation

My eye often drifts to the audience during theatrical performances. It is a habit I've gotten into as a director, gauging the effect of the performance upon its witnesses. In the space of only two performances at Bedlam Theater, zAmya's 2008 show produced the following range of responses:

A middle-aged white man sits only a row back from the play, very close to the actors. He clutches his coat close to his torso for the entire performance and talkback as though he will be burgled at any second. His face is expressionless, lips pulled tightly together, back ram-rod straight.

A Latino adolescent sits through the show, seemingly with the barest attention. His head lolls loosely on his neck, and he seems to spend as much time staring at the floor as he does at the actors. But he tells me afterward that he LOVED the show, especially the circus scene.

An elderly white woman sits in a wheelchair, tucked into the front row of chairs. She watches the whole show intently, her mouth agape in a delighted grin. Anytime an actor ventures near her, she reaches out for a grab. She claps her impossibly frail hands together often, even in the middle of scenes.

A young white woman clutches a bowl of cabernet for the duration of the performance. This is not her first drink of the evening. She is intensely involved in the performance, to the point that she seems in danger of tottering off the edge of her seat.

She wears green and red striped tights. At the talkback she voices her concern about the social issues the play brings up, loudly slurring, “But what are we going to DO-ah?”

A young white man sits close to Cabernet Lady. Throughout the performance, he calls out loud, unsolicited words and phrases, laughing loudly from time to time. His comments suggest that he is invested in and supportive of the players, but they are sort of alarming eruptions nonetheless. The Anti-Heckler appears to be doing his civic duty of audience participation.

Another young white man watches the whole show with his arms folded, nodding the actors on, very interested, studious even. I learn later that he works for an advocacy organization. He thinks *Little House* is the best zAmya show he’s seen yet (“It was so *real*,” he gushed).

Although I’d love to be able to offer an analysis of the affective circuits engaged by these audience members, the truth is that the only thing I can observe is behavior – I had only the briefest conversations with only a few of these people, and I certainly don’t know any of them over time the way I do the zAmya actors. Whether or not the audience members are managing their emotions is difficult to assess, especially because of the distinction that Hochschild draws between feeling and the performance of feeling – certainly all these audience members were performing a particular affective/emotional response to the production, but to verify the extent to which those performances were being formed by conventions of feeling is beyond the scope of this present project.

One thing I can note, and which I find interesting, is the *variety* of qualities of involvement even in this short sampling: just as the performance is profoundly polyvocal, so is the audience similarly multifaceted, and it is apparent that they receive

and respond to the performance on distinctly individual registers according to a heady mix of personal histories, cultural traditions, familiarity with theater “etiquette,” economic background, race, gender, sexuality and many other factors. As Susan Bennett remarks about theater audiences, “In the theater every reader is involved in the making of the play” (21). I’m less interested in this chapter in “reading” the performance, but I will piggy back on Bennett to suggest that every person who comes to the theater *feels*, and through that (potential) affective circuit is involved in making the art work resonate. Even though we are all in the grip of various kinds of social conditioning, and we all to some extent act according to the “system of dispositions” that Pierre Bordieu calls habitus (82), and even though we do in fact play out these behavioral roles in the theater space just as much as in any other social space, still, there are these little permissions granted by being a participant in an art event, particularly an embodied one like theater, permissions to *feel*, which are really permissions to interact with the world (as O’Sullivan says, they are portals which switch our intensive registers), and which have the *potential* to at least expose and often defy the systems which shape our actions. Whether or not audience members accept those permissions to feel, or in fact whether the production is successful in granting them, varies from show to show. But the fact remains that the potential affective circuits within a given performance event are numerous, the possibility for connections to open up, for audiences to participate affectively, exist at every twist and turn of the storytelling, in a thousand different ways. Of course this also means that there are just as many opportunities for individuals to engage in emotion management, in the effort to adhere to conventions of feeling, to convince themselves to feel what they think they ought to

feel. This marks the theater performance as an ideal site for the study of affect – not only because art itself is made up of affects, as O’Sullivan says, but because theater is also a social space, where affects travel among bodies and objects, alternatively creating portals, picking up densities, revealing spaces of power, or being suppressed behind conventions of feeling.⁴⁹

Assessing the audience’s affective involvement during a theater production is conspicuously difficult work and, as such, this section of the chapter is just a beginning, an indication of work yet to be done with the audiences of civically-engaged theater. The tools that zAmya currently has at its disposal are limited: the audience is asked to fill out surveys, and the actors and producers have as many quick conversations as they can with audience members after the show, but I often get the sense that these responses are skewed for two reasons. One, zAmya largely preaches to the choir. With the exception of that first tense man I mentioned in my sketches of audience behavior above, I have never seen anyone at the performances who did not seem willing to be there, who already, in some sense, believed themselves to be an ally of the “cause.” Two, I secretly suspect, although I cannot prove, that these well-meaning audiences engage in a tremendous amount of emotion management when they fill out their survey cards – after all, how gauche would it be to critique homeless people telling their own stories? Therefore, when we get positive feedback from audience surveys (especially feedback of the “this has changed my perspective” variety), I am always a little suspect that people are responding to the performance, and to people experiencing homelessness, the way they think they *should*.

⁴⁹ Again, these are the affect theories laid out by O’Sullivan, Stewart, Werry and O’Gorman, and Hochschild.

Although I cannot here provide a methodology for measuring affective circuitry in theater audiences during productions, I would like to tentatively propose that Hochschild's notion of refusing to engage in emotion management might be used as an indicator of efficacy when it occurs in the audience (just as I have been arguing that it does with zAmya's actors). To continue this work would require a different research period than what I employed during my participant-observation work in zAmya rehearsals, but I offer these observations as a beginning by pointing out two examples that might begin to outline what is going on affectively in the audiences during zAmya's shows. The first has to do with a particular affective response which happens frequently during performances: laughter. The second has to do with an individual case of emotion management I witnessed during a zAmya talkback in 2008.

The affective response that is most easily observable in audiences is laughter. Laughter takes the audience by surprise: they sit on their seats, waiting to receive what the show will deliver in various stages of hope or skepticism, and then suddenly they are side-swiped by something funny. Their mouths open, they forcefully exhale sound and breath, some lurch forward in their seats, others lean back in a deep guffaw, someone shares a knowing glance with a neighbor, another gleefully slaps a loved one's knee. And then this tremendous force of audience energy doubles back and slams into the performers, creating a feeling of deep warmth and acceptance – it is nurturing like food, and it makes the body light as air. Laughter produces a profound sense of well-being in the actor who has provoked it - it is one of the deep joys of acting on the stage.

To laugh is to give voice to affect (laughter is a great example of what Deborah Thien calls the motion of emotion), and it is this characteristic that gives laughter its

resistant quality. As Silvan Tomkins explains: “Because the free expression of innate affect is extremely contagious and because these are very high-powered phenomena, all societies, in varying degrees, exercise substantial control over the unfettered expression of affect, and particularly over the free expression of the cry of affect” (93). The “cry” called laughter is a complex expression, which can contain such various affects and feelings as relief, joy, recognition, triumph, shock, pleasure, and satisfaction (76-84). Laughter is spontaneous, it marks a point of rupture; it comes from the gut and is impossible to produce through calculative thinking – you cannot plan to laugh, you can only be surprised by it. Anyone can spot a fake laugh, which is precisely why it is so often unconvincing when it is performed onstage. The voicing of laughter marks zAmya as a resistant space, both because it signals the flow of affective circuits (laughter as a contagion opening up portals between people), and because it defies the convention of feeling which says *we, the privileged, must be serious around the homeless because their lives are so difficult* or *we, the homeless, must be sad all the time because our lives are so difficult*. As Ed said to me once, deadpan, “We enjoy humor too.” The laughter invoked at zAmya humanizes (by which I mean, reveals in more dimensionality) a population which is often depicted in dominant space as pitiful, defenseless, and full of sorrow (look at any homeless character appearing on a prime time serial crime drama). The Laughing Buddha in Zen is a symbol of abundance, a symbol (and an act) which flies in the face of the societal restrictions which attempt to regulate the expression of affect. Laughter is also an expression of relief, of giving over and spilling over, of connection, as opposed to this next example, a case of emotion

management where an audience member not only tried to feel the “appropriate” way, but also tried to get others to submit to her worldview.

In one talkback after *Little House* an audience member prodded Arminta to divulge details about her past (Arminta had just inadvertently hinted that she might have a criminal record): “I just want to understand,” the audience member said with some insistence, after Arminta hesitated to supply any specific details about her past. Maren quickly spoke up and prevented Arminta from having to answer this too-personal question, and then steered the conversation another direction. Although I initially dismissed this as a simple case of bad manners, upon further reflection I realized there might be more behind this audience member’s request. What led the audience member to insist on knowing more about Arminta’s past than she was willing to reveal? Was it because Arminta had already “opened up” in her role during the performance? Was the audience member standing behind her stated good intentions, that she wanted to understand, by which perhaps she meant that she wanted to become a more thoughtful member of society? Although perhaps the audience member meant well in her desire to understand a life circumstance other than her own, I think there was a real problem in her contention that it was her right for Arminta to lay bare her past, to be *known*. This demand revealed a convention of feeling which encompasses not only the old association between actors and prostitutes, people who ostensibly relinquish their right to privacy by selling their bodies, but also one tinged with the power relations found in racism – the audience member was white, and Arminta, African-American. Perhaps more to the point, Arminta is a beautiful, well-dressed, sophisticated woman – assumedly not someone this audience member had in mind when she imagined someone

with a criminal record. I think this audience member was trying to fit Arminta into a category that already felt familiar to her, and when Arminta failed to comply, she demanded that Arminta explain the “contradiction,” that she expose herself. The audience member’s effort to make the situation feel right to herself, which I am classifying as emotion management, also compromised Arminta, who was forced to engage in defensive maneuvers. Arminta was clearly feeling considerable discomfort: the affects of fear or shame appeared fleetingly upon her face and then were immediately subject to emotion management, as she let a nervous giggle escape and glanced sideways at the other zAmya folks to see if she should answer the question, avoiding, at all costs, eye contact with the audience member. Affects could be observed, but there was no affective circuit here: what I witnessed was two women engaged in managing their biological responses (as Tomkins would say) to this encounter – the audience member trying to order the scenario into something that made her feel less anxious or more “helpful,” and Arminta trying to deflect a question that might put her in the distressing situation of reliving a moment of her past she’d obviously left behind. It was a tremendously telling encounter, one which revealed a space of power, but it didn’t effect any kind of “social change” – it merely served to reaffirm the inequity between these two women.

What would have turned this encounter from one involving emotion management to one in which affective circuits could flow? Perhaps the audience member could have dwelt in her discomfort or fear, rather than trying to order the space to assuage her confusion about how a woman as well-put-together as Arminta could have a criminal record, rather than demanding that Arminta be known to her, but only in

a way that felt familiar. And perhaps that is what Maren was hinting at when she prevented Arminta from having to answer the question. Or perhaps the talkback could have been structured in such a way that Arminta would have felt as though she could voice her distress, her discomfort with the prying question, rather than trying to find ways to disguise it (the nervous laugh, the sidelong glances). What this makes apparent is that the talkback has to be as well-thought-out as the performance, because it is an equally important pedagogical part of the civically-engaged theater process.

This example also shows the extent to which the talkback is itself a performance, the stage of everyday life upon which its “actors” may either play out or defy their social conditioned roles. At a 2009 show talkback, an audience member asked the cast, “What do you want us to do?” (another question along the lines of ‘what can we do to help?’). The cast complied with the question, suggesting that they volunteer, or show the people they meet on the street who are experiencing homelessness respect, look them in the eye rather than avert their gaze; one advocate in the audience suggested that people hire or rent to those experiencing homelessness. These are all great suggestions, but I think the question itself was problematic. The audience didn’t want to engage in a process of self-reflection and critique, they wanted a list of instructions. The audience was putting the burden of responsibility on those experiencing homelessness to explain themselves and their demands, so that the audience could feel better by “helping.” Wouldn’t it have been more efficacious if the cast had turned this question back to the audience: What do *you* think you should do? What do you do already that aggravates the condition of homelessness for those of us standing up here? How can you be more self-aware? As I’ve mentioned earlier, this

gesture transforms “theater for social change” from an operation where the privileged help the underprivileged to a place where the privileged engage in deep introspection and examination of their own participation in social spaces, their own performance of social roles. It suggests that theater be a space where participants can dwell with their feelings rather than transmute them.

Certainly, these are the kinds of issues (the story about Arminta being one of the most egregious cases I’ve observed) that can arise when a theater project engages a politics of visibility. Although zAmya strives to portray people experiencing homelessness in their full humanity, this invitation is sometimes exploited, and audience members sometimes press their advantage. In what ways can zAmya combine a politics of visibility with a critique of looking? In what ways can zAmya provoke its audiences to engage in *self*-reflection, as well as ethical encounter with others? These are questions broached in more depth in chapter five, but I’ll move toward closing this chapter with an example of how I was compelled to engage in this kind of self-reflection in a workshop scenario.

Workshop Explorations: The Beginning of Intimacy

This last vignette takes place during a workshop. As I mentioned earlier, workshops comprise an important first step (before rehearsals) in the research phase of devising theatrical creations. zAmya visits various sites to talk to people about their ideas of and experience with homelessness, and to conduct story circles and play theater games in order to generate raw material that the actors can use later to create a script. It is a part of the rehearsal process unique to devising and/or to civically-engaged theater –

it rarely occurs in, say, regional theater productions which start with a script that has already been written.

I'm telling you this story because it begins to connect the ideas I've been discussing about affect in this chapter to the larger idea of intimacy I'm pursuing, so far in covert form, throughout the dissertation. My understanding of intimacy is drawn, not from psychology, but from Buddhist philosophy, and it describes a state of closeness with people and events and objects and the state of one's own mind which simultaneously avoids trying to grasp them, to order them, to dominate them, to, as Hochschild might say, manage them. Intimacy in this sense describes an ethics of care, a dynamic way of existing in social space that balances self-awareness and intentionality, and which neutralizes the binary of attraction and repulsion in favor of a gentle, playful letting-be. Letting-be, or Heidegger's word for it, *Gelassenheit*, is, as Levin remarks, "an *achievement* of sensibility, a development of our ability to feel, . . . a possibility which requires thoughtful discipline and practice. *Gelassenheit*, in fact, is a practice of the Self . . ." (Levin 235). This story I'm about to tell you describes one instance in which the theater space became for me a site of intimacy, this achievement of feeling. It is part of my larger project of trying to figure out how civically-engaged theater can more successfully become a place for the practice, and the transformation, of the self, rather a place for "helping" (with its pejorative connotation) others.

One of the first workshops I ever attend with zAmya takes place in the fall of 2007 at Salvation Army, Harbor Light, in the chapel of an emergency housing shelter. It is a workshop conducted in preparation for the year's road show (which ended up being the adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz*, called *No Place Like Home*), and the group is

divided fairly evenly between homeless and housed. After some warm-up exercises which get people moving around the space, Maren gives them all paper and pen and asks them to respond, in writing, to the following prompts: *List three things you see in the world of homelessness, then three things you taste, hear, smell, and finally, feel.*

They gather in a big circle to share their writing. People read their lists, and they are mostly harrowing. One man's responses stand out in particular. Head tilting oddly to the side, in a quiet murmur, he begins reading: *hopeless, scared, helpless, don't worry, be strong, stale, sweet.* And then at a certain point he leaves behind his text and begins an improvisation: *Kneeling in spirit and love is the best way for a man to stand – on his knees, in his spirit . . . Who wants to see homelessness? So how can you describe it? Cuz no one's supposed to be homeless. This is the belly of the beast. This is hell. You hang around long enough you go insane. You're surrounded by your fears. This is insane. This is how America treats people. You're walking around all day and all you can think of is laying down your head. This is your whole day. I am the end result of being a fool. I had two kids. I didn't raise them. I went to prison when I was 22 years old. I came home when I was 42. My god has forgiven me. I was a gang chief. I'm in charge of two, three hundred guys and I'm scared out of my mind. I may not look it now, but I was crazy. Stark raving mad. I had friends scared to say anything to me.*

The man's incessant short sentences continue on and on. Despite his disclaimer, to me he still seems crazy. I stop taking notes. I realize that I am afraid. This man could snap at any moment, I think, so much is roiling under the surface of his monotonous speech. I doubt Maren and Lecia's ability to handle the situation if it takes a violent turn. I steal a glance around the room. His fear and resentment and utter regret have spread around

this room like a contagion. But those of us listening do not “hook into” the affective circuit in a homogenous way: I myself feel completely out of place, and frankly a bit terrified, but other people are nodding, wearily, knowingly. Some are listening with their heads turned away, perhaps to hide their contempt. Some look straight at him with tears brimming in their eyes, full of anguish.

As I notice the variety of affective responses the former gang chief’s story has engendered in the group, I am suddenly snapped out of attachment to my anxieties. Then, in a moment of pathetic courage, I decide to not be afraid *of* this man, but to be afraid *with* him. I don’t know why, maybe because I feel no harm will come to me, maybe because no one else looks afraid, but I’m suddenly willing to take what he says at face value. I dislocate from my own anxieties, and drift along with the affect buzzing through the room. And I begin to feel my fear well up, not as a response to an imaginary threat this man might pose to my body, but as a *resonance* in my own body, my body vibrating at the same frequency, or keyed to the same intensity, as his. I let the fibers of my body be infected by this fear. I don’t attach to his fear, that is, I don’t constitute his fear as knowledge only insofar as it relates to me or my experience (I don’t “read” his fear). I don’t try to manage the fear; instead, I try to be-with the affect that he is releasing into the room like a soundwave. I let the affective knowledge of his fear stretch and expand my own horizon of the possible. I discover that once I encounter affect bodily, rather than discursively (that is, by making a representation out of it, by naming it and thus, trying to order it), I begin to take up my part of the pact that is the intimate encounter, the process of being-with without grasping.

At the end of his long speech, the former gang chief apologized, and then thanked the group for letting him say his piece. Why did he apologize? Why did he excuse his speech-making? His apology reveals a convention of feeling that mandates that he must neither feel fear nor express it. I believe that a space like this workshop is one of the only opportunities he has had to speak those fears, to defy conventions of feeling by refusing to manage his emotions. In a sense, the art-making process parallels the therapeutic process, the creation of a space to speak affects (and feelings and emotions) that are considered aberrant outside those spaces. The difference between the art-making process and the therapeutic process, though, is that art does not attempt to resolve those fears; instead, art makes a space to *linger* with fears and anxieties, as well as with positive affects like joy or excitement, to spread them around the room and make them tangible and acknowledge that they exist. If managing or suppressing (or even evoking alternative) feelings leads to alienation, as Hochschild suggests, and if that alienation has become status quo, what we are “supposed to” feel, then the art-making process, such as these spaces that theater workshops create to let triggered affects be expressed and conveyed, constitutes a profoundly resistant gesture.

This man’s story did not end up making it into the roadshow in a narrative sense, although I believe his affect undoubtedly left an imprint on those of us who helped compose the show. The important act here, the resistant act, was the materialization of that affect, that fear and regret, in the social space of encounter. Those who witness the monologue/rant/confession enter into temporary communion with the speaker by receiving some of the weight of its affective content – we just sat there and *took it*, and perhaps the storyteller’s feeling of being dehumanized by his world was made more

bearable because it was spread more thinly across a broader surface, the surface of our bodies. Is this Aristotelian catharsis at work? Does this man giving vent reduce his ability to take action against forces which oppress him? I really don't think so. I think that by listening to this story we in that room were all confirming his right to *feel* rage, to *feel* madness, to *feel* deep regrets. This is quite different from letting him "talk it out" in order to lessen his violent "impact" on society. By witnessing and absorbing his affect, his fear or regret, we the listeners do not make that affect go away, we incorporate it, literally, it becomes part of our history as well, it becomes amplified. We now know: this affect *exists*. We also reflect it back, and through that gesture make it visible: it hangs there in the air oscillating between us and none of us can deny it any longer.

The art-making process provided a space for this man to embrace his emotional response to a world turned upside-down, rather than attempt to transmute those feelings into something more "positive" or "productive." Lecia told me about another development workshop (that I didn't attend) where a participant went on a similar kind of rant, and at the end thanked the group for letting him get angry. This is exactly what Shklovsky is talking about – art allows us to recover and experience the *sensation* in life. When art makes room for the disenfranchised to feel madness, to feel anger, it is enacting a resistant gesture by allowing unsanctioned affects to be embodied in a social space. In this sense, the presence of expressed affect outlines the force of ideological structures designed to get these men and others like them to apologize for their anger, or to believe their anger is self-imposed and therefore should be regulated. The process also allowed me, as someone who is privileged, to contend with my own fear, to

examine its roots and to look it squarely in the face, whence it lost most of its combative power: in other words, the experience switched my register, as O'Sullivan would say. It encouraged me to reflect upon the conventions of feeling, the habitus, the dominant ideologies that had led me to be initially nervous about this guy – the way I had panicked the moment the words “gang chief” were spoken, an affective response which highlighted the utter clash between my own middle-class suburban upbringing and this workshop participant's maneuvers through informal economies, but also the intrinsic connections between these two worlds, how comfortable suburban living creates exclusions, and hence, the necessity for informal economies.

Madness, rage, fear, these are affective indicators of a dysfunctional system, and by paying attention to them, art helps us diagnose the system. The zAmya roadshow that resulted from the series of development workshops where the former gang chief told his story indicted the system of services available to those who are impoverished or experiencing homelessness. In that play (*No Place Like Home*), although the characters received Section 8 vouchers, appointments with psychiatrists, and referrals to shelters, the services inevitably fell through: no one would accept the vouchers, the psychiatrist wouldn't take a new patient for six months, and the shelter closed down due to lack of funding. These frustrations that eventually took narrative form, and which supplied a foundation for talk-backs in the roadshow, found their roots in the stories told by people experiencing homelessness very early on in the process. These enunciations of affect are literally the ground of zAmya's plays, the invisible and potent matter which sustains the art-making process.

Conclusion: Refusing to Manage

How do I substantiate these claims (I might be asked by an arts council or grantor or academic administrator)? How do I prove that affect illuminates the social world we share with others? Feelings leave traces. If affect resonates in the body, producing a connective tissue, then the best evidence I can provide is my own keen attention to these moments in rehearsal and the deep imprints they left on my embodied consciousness, such as the gratitude I felt for witnessing Arminta's openness to the theatrical event and Ed's ready support, the way it changes how I initiate relationships in the rehearsal space and elsewhere. I am not trying to essentialize affective experience, but to simply allow it a vote at the table, to recognize it as a legitimate source of knowledge.⁵⁰ I remember once I was asked in a graduate classroom "what I thought" of the play we had been assigned to read for the day, Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. I greatly admire and despise the play. The characters produce such intense longing for a life they cannot have that I find it unbearable: the play literally produces an intense physical revulsion in my gut. I appreciate how profoundly moved I am by the play, but I am moved to a place of such discomfort I'm not sure I could ever work on it. And so in the spirit of this deep affective connection, I began my response to "what I thought" by saying that the play *made my heart sore*, which was the truest way I could describe my first encounter with the play. I could tell by the slight sneer, the glazing of the eyes, that this was an unacceptable response for a serious analyst to

⁵⁰ Affect as a source of knowledge is being increasingly legitimated in other fields, such as pedagogy. See Miller for an overview of theories of affective learning, and AASCU for specific examples of qualitative, reflective questions designed to assess the breadth of diversity in academic environments.

propose. My comment was immediately passed over, and another student jumped in with a far more acceptable answer: a very thorough run down of the thematic structures contained within the play. The point was clear – affect as a kind of knowledge had no purchase in the toolkit of a serious director, and I was shamed for suggesting that it might be otherwise.

But at zAmya, affective connections are the very stuff of which the theater event is made. Certainly, it is very infrequent that a participant is shamed for voicing a feeling. It is through the expression of affect and the voicing of that affect (as well as the ensuing feelings and emotions) that zAmya begins to trace the outlines of systemic injustices that prevent those experiencing homelessness from finding jobs or homes, or from being treated with respect. The powerful pressures of addiction, the utter hopelessness resulting from being a victim of mortgage fraud, the frustration with not being able to graduate from the emergency housing system, the paralysis resulting from not finding a job due to a criminal record, the humiliation of eviction and foreclosure: these were all stimulations for zAmya's 2008 roadshow, affects that traveled through rehearsals and were excavated in performance. Ed has also mentioned to me that he thinks the goal of the Project is to get audiences to "feel our sadness." It is important to note that he is not suggesting that the performance *cure* sadness, but that the (implicitly housed) audience member experience an empathetic moment that expands his or her horizon of reality. I would add that the value of the rehearsal process is that it also permits the actors to feel their own sadness, frustration, jubilation, etc. Silvan Tomkins says: "A world experienced without any affect would be a pallid, meaningless world. We would know *that* things happened, but we would not care whether they did or not"

(88). When it is at its most efficacious, zAmya lets those affects buzz and flow, it creates portals between people with different life experiences, not to reduce them to each other, but to engender an ethics of care, of *feeling*.

If the focus on affect becomes a sort of “ethical imperative,” as O’Sullivan maintains, allowing us to contemplate “what a particular art object can do” as opposed to what it looks like (“Aesthetics” 129, 130), then I maintain that one of the criteria for a successful civically-engaged theater-making process is the extent to which it carves out room for affect to reverberate, for people to feel. I do not mean that theater should make people feel a certain way; such is the goal with a kind of performance that is trying to convince its audiences to choose a specific course of action (don’t do drugs, abstain from sexual intercourse, eat your vegetables, etc, where often the use of fear is employed to coerce thinking). I mean, rather, that civically-engaged theater works when it simply allows the affect to exist, to body forth, rather than be side-stepped or repressed. Earlier I likened the performance space to the medieval Italianate *mundus*, and suggested that the space was able to re-member bodies – affect is a big part of that process of re-membering, literally, of putting back together the body dismembered by dominant space, by restoring to it its ability to feel and express affects, and to connect with others via affective circuits. Perhaps there is no return to what Lefebvre calls an absolute space, an unmediated space, but when Arminta is able to call for help, when Marvin demands and receives attention, when the former gang chief can tap into and voice his rage, when I as an audience member am confronted viscerally with the cost to others of my own privilege – these are moments of efficacy, these are moments that resist a dominant space which packages feeling and disconnects us from our impulses.

To accompany the presence and acknowledgment of the flow of affect it proves useful to then employ a critical process, such as the multiple debriefs in rehearsal, the talk-backs after performances, or scholarly musings such as my own, which create a space of reflection to examine how affect permeates relational practices. But first, it is imperative to feel things.

Chapter Four Narrative Acts

To exist, humanely, is to name the world, to change it.

Paulo Freire

This is a chapter about storytelling. All plays tell stories, but there is perhaps no element of the theatrical event which enjoys so much variation, both in content and in form, from production to production. At zAmya, the common thread binding all the stories told from year to year is the experience of homelessness. But the intention behind the telling, the structure of the story, and the ensuing relationship between story/teller and listener all vary. To recall the sites in the theatrical process discussed in the previous chapters, story can work like an affect, traveling through a room gathering substance and meaning and density, and it can also work as the medium for a spatializing gesture, allowing the storytellers to humanize the space according to their own presence (Stewart *Ordinary* 3, Garner 179). In this chapter I compare the act of storytelling at zAmya to what Kathleen Stewart calls “narrativizing the real,” something people do “to bear witness, to leave a trace, to confer form on life and so survive” (*Space* 31, 58).⁵¹ The people Stewart writes about narrativize all through their everyday lives, and of course so do the zAmya actors, but this chapter focuses more specifically on the act of collaboratively creating a theatrical event, a prolonged and shared act of narrativizing. In other words, I am interested in how zAmya actors use experiences

⁵¹ For a beautifully efficient literature review on narrative, see Stewart’s *A Space on the Side of the Road*, where she cites the range of theorists on the subject, from Ricoeur to Jameson to LeGuin, in one chunky paragraph on pg. 29.

from their lives (which is what I mean when I refer to their “real”) to collaboratively make stories to share with others.

My point in studying narrativizing is not to ascertain whether the stories told in performance are factual or accurate (although participants often do use zAmya as a forum to redress their own misrepresentations in mainstream media outlets) – my point is to show that the act of storytelling, of narrativizing, sweeps the teller, the told, and the witness up together into a mutually constituting event (Godzich xv). This event reveals much about how the narrator makes sense of his or her world, including how that world has been “pre-narrated” by ideological forces. To invoke Roland Barthes, the act of narrativizing at zAmya can serve to illuminate and dispel the mythologies constructed by dominant forces, those various pre-scripted ideas everyone brings to the act of storytelling and story-witnessing. In fact, I would argue that one of zAmya’s primary (though unstated) goals is to promote a critical awareness of the way personal actions respond to a web of social or economic stories (and storytellers), especially when those stories have been naturalized into mythologies. For example, during the earliest *Little House* workshops, phrases like this were common: “They stole our land.” “They bailed out the banks but they don’t bail out struggling homeowners.” “They have housing resources but they won’t help us.” Finally, Big Daddy asked: “Who is *they*?” The answers came pouring forth, and the script that reached performance indicted multiple players, including big banks, wealthy businessmen, predatory lenders, deceitful advertising campaigns, and federal policies such as the Wall Street bailout and engorged defense spending. This important question, which both denaturalized and illuminated the “villain” character in the stories being narrativized even very early in

the rehearsal process, broadened the scope of the inquiry of the entire performance project, and encouraged the participants to reflect upon the way they narrativized the world and also the way they were narrativized in return.

Most of the stories told at zAmya settle in to one of three categories: stories which describe life on the streets and in shelters, stories which critique the social conditions which keep those experiencing homelessness from getting housed, and stories which imagine alternatives to homelessness. Storytelling at zAmya, then, is: a *representational* act, telling how things are, or relating autobiographies; a *critical* act, questioning how and why things are; or a *constitutive* act, an act of dreaming up and planning for alternative ways of being together. This last kind of story performs what urban planner Leonie Sandercock calls “organizing hope”: she says, “. . . we do not merely tell stories but are active in creating them with our lives. We become our stories” (192, 188). If this is the case, then what Freire says in the epigraph to this chapter, that to name the world is to change it, is a literal fact, rather than the slightly naïve metaphor it appears upon first reading.

Taking into account these three categories of story, in the first section of this chapter I will perform a *script analysis* of sorts, thinking through the various themes or images that recur in zAmya’s production history in order to address the following questions: In the process of narrativizing at zAmya, what keeps coming up? What elements continue to find their way into the stories, indicating their demand upon the attention of the participants? What sorts of Barthian mythologies invisibly structure the narratives at zAmya, and what mythologies are revealed and put to question? In the second section, I will investigate the practice of collaborative creation which produced

those stories, so, a *scripting analysis*, or an analysis of narrativizing tactics. In this section I will examine the ways in which the participants negotiated their own biographies in rehearsals and workshops in order to create a performance to share with future audiences. Here I ask: what are the actors and other members of the creative team using the stories to do, what is the intent of narrativizing? In the last section, I will perform an act of *self-reflection*, by exploring the way I narrativize zAmya into textual being in my own writing, which revisits my discussion of the ethics of representation from chapter two, and begins to outline a model for activist theater based on the Buddhist concept of non-attachment (which I will take up further in chapter five). Throughout, I am interested in identifying what literary theorist Ross Chambers calls the “transactional” nature of narrative, that is, the way that storytelling creates an event that involves people with each other (8).

Collaboratively Created Narratives

How do the actors at zAmya narrativize their life experiences to produce a performance event? I will start by examining the content of the stories, the *what* of the storytelling. In this chapter more than the previous ones I employ both “lenses” of Bert States’ binocular vision of semiotics and phenomenology, by attending to the signs and symbols and images that recur in zAmya’s stories. This is not the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and signified theorized by Saussurean linguistics, but the sometimes traceable and sometimes elusive transmutation of one’s life experience/ing into a poetic encounter (which becomes itself a new kind of experience). To produce this sort of analysis I am drawing somewhat laterally on Roland Barthes’ entry on

“Toys” in his book *Mythologies*, where he suggests that French children’s toys are “constituted by the myths or techniques of modern adult life,” and are therefore designed to socialize children into that world (53). In the case of zAmya, I am interested in how the images and stories produced for the performance event are both constituted by dominant mythologies (like Barthes’ toys) but also, and more importantly, how they might draw attention to and thereby stage a critique of those mythologies.

My research sample is comprised of the three yearly road shows devised by zAmya between 2006 and 2008 (I’ll employ the following abbreviations: *Ten You Win/Ten You Lose* (TT), *There’s No Place Like Home* (NP), *Little (Foreclosed) House on the (Stolen) Prairie* (LH)). To look at every single pattern and disruption in pattern in the three scripts would itself take up an entire dissertation, so I will limit my discussion in this section of the chapter to four tropes which appear frequently in zAmya’s shows: shelters, the streets, television, and home. I will further structure my observations by suggesting that the stories told by zAmya actors around these four tropes fall into one (or more) of the following three categories. 1) They tell *how it is*: these stories strive to represent as faithfully as possible the lived experience of homelessness from the point of view of those who have experienced it. Telling how it is constitutes an act of recuperation for people whose lived reality is often distorted by other media outlets. 2) They investigate *why it is*: these stories attempt to reveal and critique the often invisible forces which keep people in homelessness by exposing dominant mythologies. To hearken back to Arlie Hochschild (from chapter three), these stories question the shoulds and the ought tos. 3) They imagine *how it could be*: these stories propose alternatives to homelessness, and suggest ways to achieve those

alternatives. This last category of stories is particularly important, because, as Leonie Sandercock suggests, it allows story-tellers to “refuse[] to accept the plot that had been scripted for them” and instead, to “imagine another story, and envisage themselves as actors in that alternative story” (172).

The first kind of stories to be discussed here are those that tell *how it is*. Many of the actors believe that if housed audience members know more about the lived reality of homelessness, they will be more empathetic and engage in less oppressive behaviors towards those experiencing homelessness. Both Ed and Larry have mentioned that they want the audience to feel what they feel, and that this affective connection can be made through heightening the (housed) audience’s awareness of how it is for them to live in shelters or on the streets. A lot of “story space” (Sandercock 199) is devoted to communicating to audiences the often insurmountable challenges faced by those experiencing homelessness to carry out even the most normalized activities which housed people might take for granted: sleeping through the night without one’s belongings being stolen, applying for employment with no permanent address, maintaining personal hygiene, etc. Telling how it is is a pedagogical gesture designed to disrupt the mythology that homeless people are lazy or dependent or getting a free ride on the back of taxpayers. It is a plea to be recognized as human, as worthy of respect.

When the actors who have experienced a lengthy homelessness are telling how it is, they often narrativize their experience in temporary housing, such as Salvation Army’s safe bay. Shelter life is a common experiential node among many zAmya actors, and it serves as a kind of ground for the storytelling. In fact, workshops and

rehearsals often happen in or in the vicinity of temporary housing, making the topic of shelter life even more imminent and likely to show up in the stories people tell. One of the most compelling images employed throughout zAmya's production history occurred in LH, when the entrance to the shelter was marked by a turnstile, a visual indicator of the cyclical nature of the lives of many people hovering on the border between having permanent housing and residing in shelters. The characters in all three plays tend to travel that border over and over again, knocked back into the shelter system by a seemingly endless litany of causes: economic catastrophe, miseducation, addiction, racism, predatory lending practices, natural disasters, job loss, mental illness. The image of the turnstile captures the extremely tenuous existence of many people who spend time in shelters, and the constant foreboding possibility that they may end up here again.

I like the image of the turnstile so much because it tells "how it is" without confining the definition of shelter life to any one person's individual experience. All of zAmya's performances are polyvocal, created by multiple authors and reflecting multiple, often contradictory, experiences and points of view. Even within the depiction of shelter life, there are numerous stories about how it is. For example, the first shelter scene in TT introduces a variety of characters, ones who have been in the system for a long time as well as ones who are just arriving at the shelter. One character, Jim, seems to appreciate being under cover for the night and just wants to enjoy his meal in peace, whereas another character, a long-term resident named Donald, can't wait to get out and is planning on going dumpster diving later that night to improve upon the shelter's horrible meatloaf. Despite the fact that an advocate, Corey,

tries to convince them not to do or deal drugs, Donald swiftly recruits one of the new arrivals, a young man named Shawn, to go with him to buy crack. Shawn has been thrown out of his family home for coming out to his parents. And a bumbling news reporter named Lance is attempting to interview the shelter inhabitants about the county's plan to end homelessness, but doesn't make much headway: Jim brushes off the reporter with the line, "You wanna end homelessness? Here's my plan. Gimme 5 dollars."

The stories told in this scene are both structured by dominant mythologies about homelessness and work against them. In one sense, the scene tells the (stereotypical) story of impoverished black men doing drugs and perpetuating the drug trade by getting kids involved at a young age. The new shelter resident who was recruited to go buy drugs in this scene, Shawn, dies of a drug overdose later in the play. The production seems, initially, to lay the blame for this kind of destructive behavior on the individual drug dealer, Donald, which inversely reflects the American Dream mythology of pulling oneself up by one's boot straps. As I mentioned in chapter one, personal liability is a common lens through which homelessness is understood by housed people: it often results in blaming the individual for just not working hard enough to overcome adversity. However, after Shawn dies of an overdose, the actor who plays the drug dealer, Donald, tells a story, based on the events of his (the actor's actual) life, which indicts the rehabilitation programs available to impoverished drug addicts. His question to the audience is: how is a 28 day rehabilitation program going to cure an addiction decades in the making? He condemns programs which offer a mere 28 days of support and then dump the addict back onto the street and into the very environment which

fostered his or her addiction in the first place. Although the monologue does not explicitly make this critique, it is also implied that racialized oppression is a real contributor to the cycle of addiction and poverty that the character Donald has faced. The monologue concludes that support (personal support, such as having sober friends, or institutional support, such as access to drug-free shelters) is vital for the continuing success of drug addicts to stay clean. Donald's story refuses to prop up the mythology that drug dealers are too lazy or evil to work within mainstream economic opportunities, and instead suggests a more holistic analysis of the problem, one which situates the individual drug dealer within a web of social and economic flows.

As you can see in the example of Donald's monologue, the stories that tell how it is often also turn into the stories that investigate *why it is*. Donald's monologue not only articulated the complexities of his lived experience in homelessness, but also critiqued the mythology that those who are impoverished have only themselves to blame. Other stories that investigate why it is turn their critique toward authority figures and institutional practices that prevent the storytellers from finally putting the revolving turnstile that is homelessness behind them. In NP, which is an adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz*, the characters spend less time in shelters (as they do in both TT and LH), and most of their time wandering the "Yellow Brick Road" (aka the streets of Minneapolis) searching for housing aid. The characters' extensive time on the streets comports to the structure of the original story, but it also serves to represent a specific challenge many people experiencing homelessness face: urban sprawl. The streets of Minneapolis in NP are depicted as a confusing maze, an obstacle which prevents access to social services which are spread out all over the city. The play suggests that simply

because services are available (i.e. funded by private donations or the federal government) doesn't mean that those who need them have easy access to them, or that they are being organized and deployed in an efficacious (or even ethical) fashion. Directed primarily toward those members of the audience who have the means to work toward increasing the dignity of those experiencing homelessness, it critiques the version of charity that involves just writing a check or voting to fund a social service program. It is a critique made from *inside* the experience of homelessness, from those who spend the entire day traveling the city in search of food, clothes, shelter, training, or medical services. As zAmya actor Larry Brown has said to me before, "People do get lost out there, you know."

Another effort to investigate why it appears as an interesting corollary in zAmya's plays between institutional authority and the medium of television. Television personalities appear frequently as characters in zAmya's plays. As I mentioned earlier, in TT a news reporter tries to interview the character Jim about the county's plan to end homelessness, but Jim refuses to be interviewed. Jim has suggested earlier in the play that he likes being homeless, that it gives him a sense of control over his own life. He tells the reporter that to end homelessness, all Lance needs to do is give him five dollars, which leaves the reporter looking rather foolish. Jim's jest suggests that the homeless don't need to be "managed" by the state or the county, they simply need to be given the resources to begin to survive on their own terms. Rather than funding social service programs, the play seems to be saying, why not fund *people*, and entrust people to use the resources as they see fit.

TT also has two news anchors who exist in an imagined future world. They are upgraded computer models of actual Twin Cities news anchors who have no sense of time passing, and no memory except that which is fed into their processing units. Television is ultimately depicted as a (flawed) technology of dominant space in TT, where those who are transmitting the news, that is, knowledge, are manipulated robots who naively proclaim and celebrate the end of homelessness in 2016 and then immediately malfunction. The myth that television news is authoritative, much less objective, is humorously subverted in this play. Both the news anchors and the television reporter represent institutional figures who have no connection to lived reality, and no significant authority over the opinions of their viewing audience.

Another critique of television, albeit with an interesting twist, appears in LH. Here, one of the most popular scenes is of two characters in a shelter watching television. Dave and Ronald flip through the channels and see different celebrity personalities on advertisements or shows: Bill Cosby, Michael Jackson, Scooby Doo, Droopy the Dog, and other likenesses are performed rapid fire (the sequence is improvised in performance) by “TV Guy.” The scene becomes a platform for the actor playing TV Guy to showcase his talents with mimicry, but it also wages a biting critique against the advertising industry. Amidst all the other entertaining characters, TV Guy also performs an ad for “A-1 Affordable Housing” which promises housing assistance to less-qualified buyers. However, when Ronald goes to the A-1 offices to apply for a mortgage, inspired by the ad campaign, he runs up against mountains of imaginatively concocted red tape. The receptionist intentionally stymies him by asking him to provide: “a copy of your tax return from last year, employment history, state issued ID,

we need you to speak English of course, list of what you ate for the last four years, names of your tailor and launderer, mother's maiden name, any known allergies and finally your social security number." When Ronald protests that the advertisement promised to help him afford housing, the receptionist retorts, "Well, you can't believe an advertisement, now can you?" This scene highlights the way even the most vulnerable populations are targeted by advertising campaigns, and critiques the way television trains its viewers to be consumers and yet keeps the consumable object maddeningly out of reach.

Television is critiqued for its unethical advertisements in LH, but it also provides an opportunity for TV Guy to shine as a performer. TV Guy's performance is complicated though – on the one hand, it is clearly structured by dominant mythologies which confine our entertainment to television watching, but on the other, it is also an excellent example of what Suzan-Lori Parks calls repetition with revision, a dominant media form appropriated by TV Guy to produce a new and intimate live encounter with the audience (*America* 9). Television appears again late in the play in a similarly subversive way, as a dominant medium that is appropriated by marginalized populations to combat the kinds of predatory practices that make and keep low income residents homeless. This occurs when Ronald and Miss Jenkins invite news cameras to the ground breaking of a local developer who is trying to gentrify their neighborhood – his plan is to build luxury high rises and relocate the current residents to cheap housing in the suburbs. However, Ronald and Miss Jenkins expose him on live television, and extort from him a promise that he will instead build mixed-income and affordable housing in their neighborhood. They also trick the greedy developer into donating his

tax credits back to the community in which he is building, but they are only able to do so because they ask him in front of the news cameras which are taping live.

As in the story about Miss Jenkins and the developer, the stories that investigate why it is also often lead to the act of imagining *how it could be*, the third kind of story that exists in zAmya's plays. As Sandercock says, these stories constitute a refusal to accept to live in a world not of one's own making, and instead, to imagine and enact alternatives. For example, in LH, in addition to conceiving the utopian image of a whole neighborhood of affordable housing, Miss Jenkins also invites a young woman experiencing homelessness into her house and helps her access social services. In this image of how it could be, Miss Jenkins' home is spatialized by the ethos of the shelter, but it reimagines "shelter" as something undertaken by individuals and local communities rather than the state. This story also connects the audience quite intimately to the imagined line of the narrative – it provokes them to think seriously about how they can change their own behaviors to produce a more equitable world.

A last example of stories that imagine how it could be occurs in TT, where a character experiencing homelessness, Jim, reveals his frustrations with having to traverse the city during the day in search of food or shelter, but also his appreciation for the sense of community he has doing these activities with other people experiencing homelessness. He worries that he might be lonely if he lived in his own apartment. Another character experiencing homelessness, Donald, argues that he could also have community if he lived in permanent housing: "You just have to make it happen," he says to Jim. And then in a meta-theatrical moment, a third character, Melissa, casts her glance around the room filled with actors and spectators, and says: "We've got a

community, though. Right here in this room.” A very simple gesture of defamiliarization, Melissa’s line casts those present into the role of temporary community and resource for those experiencing homelessness to draw on as they transition into housedness. It blends the narrative line with the lived reality of attending a theatrical event. The line awakens those present to the value of theater: it creates temporary (and sometimes more long-lasting) community and, in fact, this is the very quality which attracts many participants to it. Larry Brown mentioned in rehearsal once that zAmya ordered his whole day, that it gave him something to get up for, to look forward to while he was on the trail. So in a sense, by being a part of zAmya, by collaboratively narrativizing with other actors, the narrative of how it could be becomes a reality (becomes how it is). Melissa and Donald argue with Jim that he doesn’t have to be homeless to have a community, he can have one right here, in the theater room. He also doesn’t have to give up the desire to live and move freely, and to govern his own life, which he earlier argues is an advantage to being homeless – by being a part of this theater project, the play seems to be saying, he retains his right to narrativize, to tell his own story the way he wishes it to be heard, rather than submitting to the story that has been scripted for him. And it is in this example that the function of *activist* theater becomes clearly stated: theater’s efficacy cannot be measured by the extent to which its participants get permanent housing, or get laws passed to help the poor into affordable housing; theater’s efficacy lies in the extent to which it creates a space for those who have been oppressively narrativized to begin to tell their own stories.

As a process of telling how it is, investigating why it is, and imagining how it could be, zAmya’s collaborative acts of narrativizing allow the actors to represent

themselves according to their own terms, to critique the ideologies which keep them oppressed, and to not only dream of a better future but, in some small ways, to enact it.

Collaborative Creation as Narrativizing Tactic

If the last section described the *results* of narrativizing at zAmya, that is, the kinds of stories that were told and the functions those stories performed in an effort to dispel common mythologies about homelessness, I'd like to turn in this section to the *practice* of narrativizing, that is, the *how* of the storytelling, especially the techniques of collaborative creation unique to the devising process. How were stories chosen and ordered within the narrative line of the script? What were the debates over subject matter, and how did these debates form the script? How was authorial power negotiated across the group? What was, as Ross Chambers suggests, the transactional nature of engaging in the act of collaborative narrativizing in rehearsal?

This section is composed of a series of fragments, moments from the rehearsal process for the 2008 roadshow *Little (Foreclosed) House on the (Stolen) Prairie* that each illuminate one aspect of the practice of narrativizing. These vignettes explore: the way an element of a story travels from workshops through rehearsals into the final script; the way the practice of narrativizing reveals certain elements and erases others; the question of who gets to narrativize or lend order to the narrative, and debates over what the narrative should do; and finally, to carry over from the first section of this chapter, instances in which the narrative acted or was constructed in an autobiographical fashion and instances in which it served to imagine alternatives to reality. The script of LH that was finally performed for audiences encompassed so

many stories that it was almost unwieldy, the shape of the script reflecting the desire to include all voices in the performance. This section traces a few of the ways such an intensely polyphonic narrative comes into being.⁵²

Tracing a Narrative Element from Workshop to Performance

In a scene that appears early in LH a character named Harry has a conversation with an advocate at Salvation Army Harbor Light. Harry has lived at this shelter for three years, the last two of which he has spent on the fifth floor in transitional housing. Transitional housing offers support services and helps residents find permanent housing, but stays are limited to two years (“Temporary”). In the scene, the advocate informs Harry that he must go back down to the first floor of the facility, to a temporary housing program called safe bay. Harry immediately protests: “First floor? Sleeping on a mat? That’s emergency housing. Are you kidding me?” The advocate has been trying to find Harry permanent rental housing, but has been unable to because of his criminal record, and now his two year limit for staying on the fifth floor is nearing its end.

This scene illustrates the predicament faced by many people experiencing homelessness who also have a criminal record. Several of the actors in this production have stayed at Harbor Light and have first-hand knowledge of the organization. Big Daddy has also worked there, and he mentions in an early brainstorming session (August 30) that when residents pay their Salvation Army rent it is easier for them to

⁵² Stewart paraphrases Barthes and Bakhtin’s articulation of narrative as “a tense, polyphonic fabulation of positions, voices, and registers” (*Space* 29).

rent once they get out, but that there are many barriers.⁵³ Some residents spend their money (often this is federal assistance) on drugs instead of their SA rent, and then can't get housing assistance for rental units outside of Harbor Light. Other people have bad credit histories, and can't get approved for housing. The problem Harry has in the scene (the criminal record) is not specifically addressed in this brainstorming session, but comes up in a workshop a few weeks later at Bedlam Theater.

This workshop, occurring on September 20th, is called a co-creative event, where members of the community are invited in to Bedlam Theatre to work with zAmya actors on generating material for the year's roadshow. It follows several brainstorming sessions between Maren, zAmya's artistic director, Josina, the roadshow's stage manager, and three of zAmya's veteran actors: Big Daddy, Larry, and Corey. The five of them have decided to structure the co-creative event, in part, as a modified Boalian forum theater scene. Maren and the actors have created a scene which depicts the challenges of acquiring a mortgage when the borrower has either a bad credit history, no permanent address, or is dealing with a predatory lender. The goal of the co-creative event is to perform the scene, and then invite the spectators to discuss the problems the scene poses. The scene begins when Big Daddy, who has been planted in the audience, "interrupts" Maren as she is talking about zAmya onstage. Corey and Larry are also plants in the audience who eventually come onstage and play out this scene with Big Daddy. However, as the scene progresses, another man comes down out of the audience and joins the scene too! At first I think he must be a zAmya actor who is new to the project, someone I haven't met yet. However, as the event wears on, I realize that

⁵³ zAmya actors have mentioned that 5th floor residents are charged a small rent, ostensibly to get them used to paying rent for permanent housing once they leave Harbor Light.

he joined the scene onstage, not because he was instructed to by the actors or because he was part of the planned scene, but because he just felt that he had something to say. When he gets to the stage, the man contributes to the narrative line of the scene by revealing that he has a felony on his record and finds it nearly impossible to establish a rental history. Later in the talkback, he reveals that he also lives on the fifth floor at Harbor Light – one of the housed audience members asks him if he could explain what that means, and this begins a conversation about Harbor Light’s housing programs, and the challenges faced by the residents of these programs.

The gentleman who spontaneously joined the scene at Bedlam did not join the cast for that year’s roadshow, but his story made it squarely into the narrative of LH, manifesting as the scene between Harry and the advocate. My point in tracing this narrative element from workshop to performance script is to show how the stories told at zAmya are not just spelled out by one actor and then immediately scripted into the play. They tend to be composed over time, and they include multiple voices. The real is narrativized and re-narrativized as it travels through the performance-making process. This practice radically reframes the notions of actor, writer, story: zAmya’s actors sometimes tell autobiographical stories, but they also stand in as allies to get other people’s stories told; the author function at zAmya is rarely single or autonomous, but usually multiple and collaborative; and story arises from a weblike series of locations and bodies, a polyphonic tale resulting from multiple narrativizing acts.

The narrativizing process also extends into the audience. The story about Harry’s difficulty in getting housed is not only designed to tell “how it is;” it will also, hopefully, produce an act of defamiliarization in the audience. This story might cause a

housed audience member (or housed zAmya actor, for that matter) to reconsider what is largely a normalized practice in our society: screening prospective tenants for rental “suitability.” All landlords can look up a prospective tenant’s rental, criminal, and credit histories, and there is a whole industry devoted to performing just such screenings.⁵⁴ No landlord is required to rent to someone if he or she has a criminal conviction on his or her record.⁵⁵ On the surface, it makes sense – especially in multiple unit dwelling structures, the impetus behind screening is to create a safe environment for everyone who lives there. But where does that leave people like the gentleman who joined the Bedlam scene? This is the dilemma the play seeks to illustrate with the scene in LH between Harry and the advocate, and which the play compels the audience to think through. The scene invites the audience to “re-write” or renarrativize their own notion of a just society. If they accept this invitation, then the performance becomes exactly what Chambers refers to as transactional.

Furthermore, the actors who played the scene in performance, Corey and Crystal, are currently housed. So although the play was telling a story that had roots in “real life,” it was not enacted by those who originally experienced it. In this sense, the production is not strictly autobiographical. However, we could imagine that the production is also presenting Corey and Crystal in this scene as “versions of themselves” (Govan, Nicholson, and Normington 56). In other words, Corey and Crystal are not currently homeless, but they could be under different circumstances. In

⁵⁴ For example, in Minnesota the BCA (Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension) keeps both public and private records for all state residents. The public records, which include all convictions, can be accessed by anyone (Baillie, et al 1).

⁵⁵ In other words, this would not be considered a discriminatory practice as outlined by Minnesota Statute 363a.09 (Office of the Revisor).

fact, the previous year's show (2007) dealt with just this kind of homelessness, where a natural disaster or a job loss plunged the characters into homelessness without a moment's notice. The 2008 show, LH, dealt explicitly with the collapse of the real estate market and the foreclosure crisis, events which also made many "unsuspecting" homeowners suddenly homeless. If Corey and Crystal are, simultaneously, themselves (housed) *and* playing versions of themselves (the potentially homeless version), then the production posits the narrativizing self as something that is in process, radically unfinished, and always on the verge of potentialities (Govan, Nicholson, and Normington 81).⁵⁶ It rolls what "is" and what "could be" together into one multifaceted and multiply-experienced character. And furthermore, if the housed actors are potentially future homeless people, how hard is it for an audience member to imagine that his or her future might also contain this potentiality? The value of this act of defamiliarization is not that it reduces everyone in the room to a sameness, but that it enlarges the boundaries of the "felt" community to include all those present by virtue of a shared potential future.⁵⁷

The impromptu workshop participant's lived experience with housing difficulties due to a criminal record was narrativized first at the co-creative event, almost by a lark; then, the bones of this man's story traveled through the narrative of zAmya's play by virtue of Corey and Crystal's remembering, through their desire as allies to make this story known; the story gained density, was beefed up, through Big

⁵⁶ Isn't this also the kind of self that we encounter using Stanislavski's *magic if* (59)? The self that we cannot ever get away from coupled intimately with another self-character in imagined or alternative circumstances?

⁵⁷ Bruce McConachie, in his meditation on grassroots theater, draws on Raymond Williams and Anthony Cohen to suggest: "Together and over time, people in communities create boundaries between what is to be included and what must be excluded from their social group" (38).

Daddy's narrativizing of his own experience with Harbor Light residents; and then the story appeared in performance as both a polyphonically narrativized account of lived experience and a depiction of a potential future for the currently housed participants in the room that day. This is not to describe a teleology (or, for that matter, a prescription for CBT), but to think through the way ideas or images drift through the art making process and the consciousness of those who participate.

What Gets Erased by the Act of Narrativizing?

You may be wondering why the 2008 roadshow was called *Little (Foreclosed) House on the (Stolen) Prairie*. The show's title riffed on a number of themes, including the foreclosure crisis, American mythologies about home, and the concerns of local Dakota people about their lost ancestral lands and erased histories, which I will discuss here. The 2008 show coincided with Minnesota's sesquicentennial. Several of the cast members wished to trouble the narrative of Minnesota's "founding" by bringing attention to the people who were on the land before it was "discovered" by European settlers. Dakota scholar Chris Mato Nunpa was invited to rehearsal at St. Stephen's on August 3, 2008, to discuss with the cast why celebrating Minnesota's founding was so distasteful to the Dakota people.

Mato Nunpa greeted us in Dakota, and then in English told us that his people have nothing to celebrate on this sesquicentennial year. He gave us a news article from 1863 which announced that the bounty for "dead Indians" had been increased to \$200, and also described the enforced migration of Dakota people off their ancestral lands in that time period – events of this nature constituted a genocide of the Dakota people, he

said. He also shared a copy of the Treaty of 1805, which Mato Nunpa told us was violated when the US government paid only a fraction of the price they agreed to for the land ceded from the Sioux people, which include the Dakota, and have further violated the terms of the treaty by preventing the Sioux from hunting on the land and performing rituals at sacred places within the territories ceded. He then linked these historical events to his own life, describing the religious “conversions” he endured as a young man living on a reservation in the 1940s where three different churches had mission stations: “Each church had to give me the correct baptism: I was sprinkled, sprayed, and dunked.” He also described various “counter-events” which he had organized recently to protest the sesquicentennial celebration, such as fishing in Lake Harriet or performing sacred rites at Coldwater Spring in South Minneapolis. The Treaty of 1805 explicitly gave the Dakota permission to continue these activities on the stolen land. Not only were the Dakota cheated out of the price they were promised for the lands, they have not been allowed to continue these sacred activities on the land. The treaty has been broken, he says. He told us his goal was to get arrested during one of these activities so that he could “get this issue in the court,” so that the legality of the Treaty could be challenged within today’s legal structures.

I remember when Mato Nunpa was speaking at this rehearsal that all of us listening were bonded in quiet outrage, both that these injustices had been perpetrated but also that many of us didn’t *know* about them, that these events were not part of our education in local history. Larry felt a connection between the enforced migration of Dakota people and the issues of homelessness that zAmya tries to address. Esther voiced a concerned plea that the play not collapse foreclosures and genocide:

“Foreclosure is really little in comparison to genocide,” she said. Corey felt that the introduction of this material lent a new gravity to zAmya’s roadshow, a level that no previous roadshow had reached. Maren said it made her think hard about the very land she was standing on right at this moment, the stolen land. She also asked the rest of the actors: “What do we do with this huge thing?” Although the group recognized the importance of respecting the history that Mato Nunpa had narrated to us, and although the possibility for marshalling this history to critique the notion of manifest destiny inherent in the narrative of “moving west” in *Little House on the Prairie* was tantalizing, there was also a collective sense of anxiety about doing enough justice to Mato Nunpa’s story within the parameters of the production.

And in fact, despite the best of intentions, the history of the Dakota people remained quite marginalized within zAmya’s performance of LH. Esther read parts of the Treaty of 1805 after the opening montage, a series of images about home acquisition underscored by the theme to the television series *Little House on the Prairie*, but this was the first and last reference to the Dakota people in the show. This was not so much an issue of autobiography, as it was an issue of advocacy. It was as though once Mato Nunpa left the room, there was nobody there to represent his interests, and this is perhaps the darker side of valuing what is “right there.” If the community-based production seeks to value what is right there, then what is *not* right there often gets overlooked.

By virtue of Esther’s impassioned reading of the text of the treaty, the Dakota land claims haunted the production, but they did not in any overt way become fully integrated in the story. If narrativizing is an ordering or placing of events, then the

concerns that Mato Nunpa brought to the company's attention drifted to the side of the narrative in the 2008 show to make room for the many, many other stories that were given more focus during the rehearsal process that year. Happily, though, these concerns resurfaced in the next year's roadshow, during a scene in which an Ojibwe woman in the cast performed a fancy shawl dance in honor of her cultural heritage. I certainly do not wish to conflate the Dakota and the Ojibwe people or their histories, but the dance in the 2009 show seemed to function in a similar way to Mato Nunpa's defiant fishing in Lake Harriet: both gestures served to name or narrativize a world and a history that had been effectively erased by more powerful structures and groups of people. Both instances of naming were efforts to lead a humane existence, as Freire describes, in the face of great obstacles. Like a palimpsest, the 2009 show allowed concerns voiced but then glossed over in previous years to rise to the surface of the narrative, glimpsing through.

Who Gets To Narrativize?

The process of narrativizing, the process of ordering events into a performance, of making sense of, or as Stewarts says, making *something* of, is a collaborative event at zAmya, and indeed, there are no passive participants in the Project. But that doesn't mean that all participants narrativize equally, as this vignette will illustrate. At a workshop on August 30, 2008, actors Crystal, Larry, and Big Daddy, stage manager Josina, and director Maren had come together to continue the preparations for the co-

creative event that zAmya was hosting at Bedlam in a few weeks' time.⁵⁸ They began, as always, with a few warm-ups to wake up the body and focus the attention. Then Maren reminded them of the work they had been doing up until this point, which had resulted in the outlining of a few scene/character ideas: one was about a landlord, one was about a woman whose house has just been foreclosed, etc. These were skeletal outlines that now needed to be fleshed out into scenes that the actors could perform as modified forums for the co-creative event in September. So the question that Maren posed at this point was: What now? What structure does the act of narrativizing take now?

Into this space of possibility stepped Crystal, who has a lot of experience with devising and who in fact works at a local high school with theater students. She suggested that the co-creative event be staged as an open mic, which the actors, who are planted in the audience, keep interrupting – these interruptions could then serve as platforms upon which to make points or tell stories about homelessness. Big Daddy and Larry enthusiastically agreed to try it, but after some shuffling around the space, it became clear that neither actor really knew how to proceed with this idea. Attention became diffused, Maren got frazzled and momentarily withdrew, Josina asked for focus, and then again Crystal stepped into the confusion and attempted to get the improvisation on track by asking Big Daddy: “What would be a good topic for a scene at Salvation Army?” Big Daddy’s response to this question had to do with the challenges that Harbor Light’s residents have in establishing rental histories (I talked

⁵⁸ The rehearsal period in 2008 went like this: August was devoted to a series of five workshops designed to generate material and plan the co-creative events, which took place in late September. Rehearsals proper began in early October, and the performances, as always, took place the week before Thanksgiving.

about this earlier in the chapter). He expressed frustration with residents who spend money on drugs instead of on their SA housing, and more frustration with his inability to affect these people's decisions: "If they don't pay their rent and [instead] spend money on drugs, they won't get housing help. I can't say anything!" Crystal prodded him: "Why can't you tell them?" Larry ominously murmured, "Company policy," and Maren contributed, "If you were a counselor, you could say that, but counseling is a whole separate division [Big Daddy was working security at the time at SA]." At that point, seemingly revitalized, Maren took Big Daddy's frustrations with the SA residents and began crafting a story out of the material. "Maybe there is one character who pays their SA rent and gets housing," she mused to the group, "and then there is another character who doesn't pay and has to stay in emergency housing, and then a third character . . ." As Maren slowly worked through this scenario out loud, Big Daddy, still in the flames of frustration, suddenly threw up his arms: "And who houses the mentally ill??" Maren stared at him for a moment, then gently directed focus back to the characters she had just been outlining. Her attitude toward Big Daddy's comment was appreciative, but she also said, "I don't want to get distracted by that huge topic." The rest of the rehearsal was a series of improvisations where the actors got up and created little dialogues with each other around the issue of affordable housing. The structure of the improvisations resulted from a negotiation between Maren and Crystal about how to best use the rest of the rehearsal time.

My extended description of this workshop is intended to highlight the different functions each member of the creative team assumed on this day. Generally speaking, Crystal and Maren were engaged in structuring maneuvers, suggesting games to play

that would flesh out the material, asking pointed questions to add dimension to a story, or ordering events into a possible narrative. Larry and Big Daddy were engaged mostly in contributing the “raw material” to the story-making process, and in playing out the games that the women suggested. Before the division between these two groups of people becomes overly simplified (and the danger of that happening is great, due especially to the fact that Maren and Crystal are white, housed, educated women, and Big Daddy and Larry are African-American men who have both experienced homelessness), I would like to point out that just “reading” the actions of this rehearsal flattens its meanings. Although Maren was often engaged in trying to direct and structure the stories being told (or imagined), she did so at a snail’s pace and usually only after considerable pauses. I imagine that she was doing this to encourage Larry and Big Daddy to take over the narrativizing process. In fact, the August workshops themselves were designed not only to plan the September co-creative events, but Maren also spent a lot of time training three veteran zAmya actors, including Big Daddy and Larry, to be facilitators. In other words, Maren was teaching the actors the tools that she uses to direct or facilitate zAmya’s work. As opposed to just narrativizing Big Daddy’s “real” into a story for performance, Maren was (and is) actively trying to transfer the means of production to the actors themselves.

Furthermore, it doesn’t always happen that the currently or previously homeless actors contribute the raw material and the housed participants shape it. Later in the process, when more actors joined the team, they worked much more closely with shaping the narrative of the show, with narrativizing their collective yet heterogeneous real. zAmya has actors like Marvin, who have both experienced homelessness and are

experienced performers, and who complicate this division between those who narrativize and those who simply contribute raw material: many times in rehearsal I've seen Marvin take over warm-ups, setting the tone and rhythm of rehearsal, or give other actors specific authorial feedback, narrativizing not only his own real but that of the other participants as well.

To even further complicate the division of labor, I'd like to point out that once the story is "set," that is, once a script is written, once the events of people's lives are narrativized into a performance text, the actors, in performance, inevitably re-narrativize the material. There is quite a bit of improvisation that occurs in performances themselves, quite a bit of wavering away from the written text of the script, and this is perfectly legitimate at zAmya. In fact, there was a rehearsal that I witnessed for a remounting of *Ten You Win/Ten You Lose*, where Big Daddy was having trouble remembering a monologue that he had improvised, and then Josef Evans (zAmya's playwright until 2008) had scripted. When Big Daddy stopped rehearsal to say he couldn't remember the lines, Joe said to him: "It's your story. Tell it how you want." There was no need to "go back" to what was written on the page – Big Daddy simply spoke from the memory of his own experiences, and the rehearsal flowed smoothly on.

The stories that reach performance, therefore, are malleable things, infinitely stretchy, and constantly refigured. The act of narrativizing is alternately appropriated by those who "belong" to the story and those who are lending it structural form from the outside. Do Maren and Crystal's structuring maneuvers constrain and limit the stories told by Big Daddy and Larry, or do they open them up? Does this act of mediation constitute an act of violence, or does it foreground the radically open nature of narrative

itself? Although it appears on the surface that, in my description of the August 30th workshop, Maren and Crystal had more power over the event, because they were more overtly engaged in the act of narrativizing the “real” (or perhaps, the “experienced”) supplied by Big Daddy and Larry, I wonder if the relationship is not in fact more symbiotic, if the story-tellers and the story-structurers need each other to produce a dimensional event for the audience to grapple with. And perhaps the fact that actors experiencing homelessness became more and more involved in the act of narrativizing as the rehearsal process wore on indicates that Maren’s efforts to transfer authorial power were working. In any event, it seems useful to constantly ask the question throughout the rehearsal process – Who gets to narrativize? – as a sort of mantra reminding all those involved to be mindful of the power inherent in naming the world.

The Collaborative Process: Negotiating the Narrative’s Intent

The last vignette illustrated a kind of negotiation that happens around the narrative’s content and structure. In this mini-section, I’d like to describe the way actors and other zAmya participants discuss what a narrative should *do*. After five workshops, two co-creative events, and nearly a month of rehearsals, a script had finally been culled together from the enormous amount of raw material generated at these various events. At the October 27 rehearsal, Joe passed out the draft of the script (about the first half of what ended up being the performance text) and just before the actors did a read-through, he stressed: “If you feel the scene isn’t what you were thinking [when you improvised it], *tell us* – we’ll adjust the script.” Again, as always, when Joe is scripting zAmya’s shows, his main intention is to give focus to the stories and

characters the actors created in rehearsal.⁵⁹ In fact, the opening monologue which appeared in the October 27 draft was spoken first by Arminta in rehearsal several weeks earlier. As she spoke, both Joe and I furiously typed the words coming out of her mouth, and the monologue that ended up in performance is very close to the originally improvised text. Joe's work on this production especially could be more aptly understood as documentation than playwrighting.⁶⁰ Of course, Arminta was free to continue tweaking the monologue as she saw fit; even if she said it, and even if it was written down, it could still be subject to revision, to come closer to, as Joe said, what the actors were thinking when they improvised. This give and take between orality and the written text is common practice at zAmya, and Arminta took advantage of that by making adjustments to the monologue throughout the rehearsal process.

The discussion which followed the read-through on October 27 also illustrated this give and take between what the actors had said or improvised previously and what they had meant (or what they now desired) for the script to *do*. After the draft was read out loud, Darrell ruefully mentioned that he didn't want "to see every black guy fail." Corey said that he wanted the character who was *least* likely to succeed, to succeed! Several other actors nodded in agreement. These actors wanted a success story, and the discussion after the read-through was a negotiation aimed mostly at imagining ways in which the script could narrate different versions of success for the characters. What is

⁵⁹ A potential caveat is when zAmya does adaptations, such as when Joe and Maren suggested using *The Wizard of Oz* to loosely structure the plot and characters of *There's No Place Like Home*. This is, though, to echo Suzan-Lori Parks, a case of repetition with major revision. The actors are not a community theater seeking to put on the famous musical merely to entertain, they are a group of people with a pointedly specific socio-political agenda appropriating the "bones" of a familiar story to tell an unfamiliar one.

⁶⁰ I'm not suggesting that documentation is automatically transparent, but that Joe is trying his best not to apply any kind of authorial manipulation to the events the actors narrate in rehearsal.

interesting, though, is that the script that they had already improvised did not itself narrate a success story.⁶¹ Most of the actors were now engaged in trying to re-narrativize, in trying to maneuver the remainder of the script into telling different stories than the ones they had created, piecemeal and polyvocally, over the past three months. There was one dissenter: Ed said in no uncertain terms that he wanted the characters to *lose*; he wanted the audience, not the production, to work out solutions to homelessness. Maren countered Ed, suggesting that the production should offer at least a “glimmer of hope,” maybe by showing characters “on the way back around.” Picking up mainly on Corey and Darrell’s comments, Maren asked the actors to think of what kinds of interventions could be made in the second half of the script so that the characters didn’t fall back into the cycle of moving in and out of homelessness.

This discussion notably shaped the way the rest of the script came into being, resulting in the story of Ronald and Miss Jenkins cleverly defeating the greedy developer, the malfunction of the robot mortgage lenders, and Freddy’s (the only character in the play who lives on the street) decision to enter rehab at Harbor Light. Ed’s concern that the audience be involved in “finding solutions” was also incorporated into the narrative when, in the last moment of the show, the audience was invited to participate in the “rebuilding” of Floyd’s house – they were each given a cardboard brick, upon which they were asked to write “an action that is needed to create a society that ends homelessness and supports self-sufficiency.” The audience members read their brick ideas aloud and then affixed them to the big cardboard house onstage

⁶¹ So far in the script, Miss Jenkin’s neighborhood is overrun by vandals, Harry can’t get permanent housing because of his criminal record (not to mention having his head lopped off by hungry lions!), Eliza is stigmatized because of her mental illness, Floyd’s house has been foreclosed and his job lost, and Ronald cannot qualify for a mortgage.

(Floyd's foreclosed home); this gesture mingled the actors and audience members in a way which naturally flowed into one-on-one conversations on the stage itself. The rebuilding segment of the show also involved the audience in the act of narrativizing, which highlighted the transactional nature of this sort of collaboratively created narrative.

The negotiation about the intention or function of the narrative which occurred in rehearsal on October 27 profoundly complicates the notion of a community-based play simply transmitting a single reality to the stage. The narrative succeeded in speaking polyvocally, without destroying its internal congruity: both Corey and Darrell's desires to see African-American characters succeed *and* Ed's desire for the audience to work together to imagine solutions were woven into the narrative of the show. The story also spoke volumes about the collective yet heterogeneous values and principles of the creative team: the narrative illustrated the desire to expose the way things "are" for people experiencing homelessness, but also the desire to imagine "new possibilities and models for living" (Ricoeur qtd. in Govan, Nicholson, and Normington et al 57).

Autobiography or Utopia?: Blurring the Distinction Between What Was and What Could Be

This final mini-section picks up on the negotiation about the function of the narrative that revealed itself in the feedback session on October 27. When I say that zAmya functions as a forum for the actors' own stories, I mean that quite literally: zAmya's goal is to make room for actors to name their experience with homelessness,

but also to tell stories that they have dreamt up (either by themselves or in collaboration) in rehearsal. Why? Because, as Freire says, to name the world is to change it. I don't take this to mean that naming is a first step to changing the world, but rather that naming the world is itself the act of changing the world into one where one whose experience was previously named for them now names their own experience. To name the world *is* to change it because being someone who narrates their own story is diametrically opposed to being someone who is playing out the story that is, as Sandercock says, scripted for him or her. Story in this sense is a slippery amalgamation of the real and imagined, often utopian, alternatives, but it is always at least partially an act of agency, of self-definition.⁶²

For example, Big Daddy's character in LH is called Ronald. Big Daddy is a (former) resident of Salvation Army Harbor Light, and so is Ronald. Big Daddy offers other shelter residents support through a sort of tough-love discipline, and so does Ronald. Big Daddy is concerned with increasing affordable housing in his neighborhood, and so is Ronald. All of these character traits are substantially *autobiographical*: they stem directly from Big Daddy's experience residing and working at SA. But then in the second half of the play, Ronald and Miss Jenkins hatch a scheme to trick Darrell, the wealthy developer, into building mixed-income housing in their neighborhood instead of luxury high-rises. This storyline constitutes a profoundly *utopian* gesture. However, the narrativizing act itself remains within the realm of autobiography. Big Daddy is still the one crafting the character and, collaboratively, the

⁶² To make the argument that when we narrativize we are always only rehearsing the narratives imposed upon us by dominant cultural mythologies is to miss the point that individual narrativizing is always, as Suzan-Lori Parks says, repetition with revision – it is the sometimes minute alterations we make to the grand old story that count, alterations which are inevitable when *this* body encounters *that* story for the first time in history.

situations the character inhabits.⁶³ From a phenomenological perspective, where anything that appears to consciousness is radically accepted as one's reality, even the imagined and narrated utopia is part of Big Daddy's "biographical" experience.⁶⁴ The division between real and imagined is not so clear. If you can imagine it, if you can *name* it, it enters into the realm of possibility. But more importantly, the act of imagining, itself, is an actual activity.

To illustrate a contrast, for example, I created a character in rehearsal (one of the deranged robot mortgage brokers) that Big Daddy was later asked by Maren to play in performance. It was obvious that Big Daddy felt a little sheepish playing this character (the metallic antennae headpiece dangling above his eyes probably didn't help), who was a far cry from the grounded, passionate, realistic characters he usually created for zAmya's shows. Why did he feel uncomfortable in this role? The robot was as "imagined" as the utopian story about tricking the builder. I believe that the reason Big Daddy was uncomfortable playing the robot is *not* that Ronald was real and the robot was imagined, but that Big Daddy did not create the character of the robot ("real" or imagined) like he did the character of Ronald. In the case of Ronald, Big Daddy dictated the terms of his own engagement with the project, instead of having those terms dictated by someone else. Although this example blurs the distinction between autobiography and utopia – Ronald's character is an amalgamation of both - it clarifies the importance of authorial presence, which really comes down to the practice of

⁶³ As opposed to the early workshop I described near the beginning of this section, where Maren and Crystal were doing a lot of structuring, in this later stage of rehearsal, it was the actors who really lent structure to this (imagined) storyline.

⁶⁴ "... if one were looking for an alternative to the radical skepticism of deconstruction and postmodernism – its 'uninhibited questioning of everything,' as Eugene Goodheart puts it – one can find it most readily in the phenomenological attitude that uninhibitedly *accepts* everything it sees" (States "Phenomenological" 370).

narrativizing, of making sense of or ordering events into a story to be witnessed by others. Big Daddy narrativized Ronald, he used Ronald to name the world; in contrast, he stepped into the role of the robot which was narrativized by another author, me. When zAmya makes a space for those experiencing homelessness to tell their own stories, this is what is important – the act of narrativizing itself, not the narrative’s truth value. This is why zAmya devises plays rather than just putting on plays that have been written by another playwright.

I think zAmya is clearly devoted to the practice of narrativizing the real, but is there also value in imagining utopia? Activist performance scholar Jill Dolan says, unabashedly, yes – it is not only valuable or desirable, it is actually possible to experience a glimpse of utopia within the performance event itself. In her article on performative utopias, Dolan says, “. . . definitions [of utopia] all point to the future, to imaginative territories that map themselves over the real. The utopia for which I yearn takes place now, in the interstices of present interactions, in glancing moments of possibly better ways to be together as human beings” (“Performance” 457). Therefore, it is not the possibility of actualizing an imagined utopia in the future, but the act of imagining itself, in the present, that is utopian. It is the act of coming together with other people and imagining, thinking outside of the ruts embedded deeply into our consciousness by mechanical (meaning habitual) or otherwise oppressive living conditions. zAmya actor Larry describes life on the streets as “getting lost out there.” Narrativizing within the art-making process provides an anchor in this abyss, a way to appear again after being lost, an appearance whose circumference is described by one’s own naming of experience. To echo Stewart again (who is herself paraphrasing novelist

Ursula K. Le Guin), people narrativize “to bear witness, to leave a trace, to confer form on life and so survive” (*Space* 58).

And witnessing the act of narrativizing also has impact upon the audience. For audience members experiencing homelessness, it offers the opportunity to contribute to the narrative, such as the gentleman who spontaneously walked onstage to talk about his difficulty acquiring permanent housing, or the woman I mentioned in chapter two who called out transportation advice to Dorothy and the Scarecrow during a performance of *There’s No Place Like Home*. zAmya is also a place where those experiencing homelessness see their own lived experience represented with more dimension than in any other performative medium. For privileged or housed audience members the act of witnessing the narrativizing act serves as a gesture of defamiliarization which is close to the kind of present utopia that Dolan describes: imagining different ways of interacting with those experiencing homelessness other than ignoring or mistreating them, imagining different ways of carrying on in one’s life that avoid even the inadvertent discriminations that are so woefully easy to perform simply by doing nothing. This way of being together is actualized in performance, when an actor tells the story he has crafted and the audience member witnesses it, receives it, and is marked by that act of creation.

The very act of imagining alternate realities is a two-part operation. First we have to observe how things are. And then we imagine a variation. I will pick up on this more in chapter five, but I would like to point out briefly that this is the very same operation engaged by insight, or vipassana, meditators. As I’ve mentioned previously, the guiding teacher at Common Ground Meditation Center in Minneapolis, Mark

Nunberg, teaches this mantra: “This is how it is. Can this be OK?” The first part constitutes an act of defamiliarization – really seeing what we look at, making the familiar strange. The second part allows for change if, upon careful observation and reflection, we realize that “this” cannot be OK. This two-part operation also resonates with Freire’s pedagogical tactic (as quoted in the epigraph): “To exist, humanely, is to name the world, to change it” (69). I think this quotation could be read in one of two ways. 1) Naming the world (this is how it is) is a necessary precursor to changing the world (can this be OK?). Or 2) To name the world *is* to change it, because naming, or narrativizing (the way zAmya’s shows make works of art out of “reality”), is always an act of translation, an intentional gesture which empowers the person narrating by virtue of the authorial power conferred. In both cases, the act of narrativizing, the act of naming, is intimately linked to one’s sense of agency in the world, and one’s ability to maneuver through it on one’s own terms. It is also linked to Garner’s notion of spatializing gestures which I discussed in chapter two – to narrativize, to name the world, is a way of extending into the world and humanizing it according to one’s own presence. This is utopian, but it is also *possible*, within the space of performance.

Ethnography as Narrativizing Tactic

Writing Mindfully

The –graphy part of the ethnography is a writing, a naming, a *narrativizing*, an ordering of events. This writing, my writing, is, like the stories composed in zAmya’s rehearsals, also a fusion of lived experience and imagined alternatives, a continuum between what was and what could be. This writing has an intent that has been

negotiated, and it reveals certain ideas and people at the expense of others. The ethnography, like zAmya's plays, always bears the mark of its maker/s, even when the meaning of that mark is transformed as it travels into the audience's realm of experience.

My own narrativizing process as an ethnographer at zAmya has always been fueled by self-reflection (sometimes bordering on anxiety) in rehearsal. As I mentioned in chapter three, I spent the better part of my first season with zAmya wondering what exactly I should be doing in that room. Should I act as an assistant director, lending my theatrical expertise to making the production more artistically successful? Should I be an actor/ally, helping to write and perform the show? Should I sit quietly in the corner, jotting down notes and avoiding any interference in the process? My involvement in zAmya's production process has been a mixture of the three, but mostly I do sit and watch, and contemplate the process. At first I was nervous about what appeared to be my own rather passive involvement in the Project's activism. But the value of this kind of contemplative existence in the theater space became increasingly apparent to me after I read performance studies scholar Gay McAuley's essay on rehearsal ethnography, where she remarks,

In theatre studies, the productions that form part of our research and teaching all too often do not lead to extended study, but make of us pseudo-practitioners, caught up in the unceasing need to produce more theatre, denying ourselves the space for reflection and analysis. Ethnographic practice provides a useful alternative model: a period spent in the field followed by many months (even years) of study, reflection, and writing . . . (77)

McAuley's description of ethnography can be thought of as a kind of sabbatical for the theater practitioner. I like the etymology of sabbatical, which comes from the

language of agriculture and denotes a time for the land to lie fallow. I can imagine that the time I spend in someone else's rehearsal and the ensuing write-up phase is this sort of sabbatical for my directing self, a time to remain untilled, to nourish my creative well and spend time in reflection, rather than in production. And it has also allowed me to engage with zAmya's activism, albeit in a deferred way, in that doing ethnography with zAmya has been a time to reformulate the way I think about making "professional" theater: zAmya has compelled me to wonder about whose bodies are allowed access to the privileged space of performance, whose stories get told, and what manner of story-telling or story-crafting is most efficacious for a particular space or community.

As a constant yet specialized surrogate audience member, this ethnography has also given me the opportunity to think about what potentialities exist between the performance and its witnesses in activist theater, and these musings have profoundly ordered the way I write about zAmya. To begin with, when we, as scholars or practitioners, talk about "theater for social change," what do we mean exactly? What change? Performed by whom? Upon whom is change enacted? As I have alluded to previously, I have some considerable uneasiness about this term "theater for social change," because it dredges up images of the privileged sailing in to the territories of the underprivileged and "helping." I worry that this activity eases the conscience of the privileged who are involved, but in fact does very little for the underprivileged, leaving them feeling like a tourist attraction.

My experience of being an ethnographer, especially during the time that I give myself permission to sit in contemplation in the room, has suggested a different model for being in the space of a civically-engaged theater event, or a different potential

transaction between the event and its witnesses: that is, rather than an act of helping, I have come to understand ethnographic practice (and by extension the witnessing of the activist theatrical event) as *the act of being in the space without the desire to change it*. This does not describe the (seemingly) objective, authoritative posture of early ethnographers in “exotic” locales, nor does it resonate with more contemporary participant-observation tactics which attempt to nativize the ethnographer.⁶⁵ The ethnographic practice I seek to cultivate is a reflective time for myself as a creative artist, and in that sense it is productive and active, but it is also an act of *not-doing* to the rehearsal process itself. I understand not-doing as a radical practice in an art form that is often labeled “theater for social *change*,” a name which implies a very active *doing*.

In principle, what I am calling not-doing echoes Dwight Conquergood’s practice of “copperformative witnessing,” where one quietly occupies the space of another and allows the experience to make an “impression” upon the observer/listener (“Performance” 149). However, I primarily derive the notion of not-doing from Buddhist philosophy, and the practice of non-attachment, which describes the act of “uprooting the primal compulsions of desire: the urge to acquire, consume, or grasp what is gratifying; and the impulse to ignore, reject or destroy what is regarded as hateful” (Olendzki, “Greatest” 1). To practice not-doing means to release oneself from the twin impulses of grasping and aversion – it means to radically accept all that

⁶⁵ D. Soyini Madison outlines these genealogies of ethnography in her book *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*, although the critique aimed at participant-observation methodologies is my own. Although I too engaged in some “participation” in zAmya’s activities, I constantly reminded myself of my own outsider status, an act which productively defamiliarized zAmya’s creative process for me as an observer and helped me avoid situating myself as “resident theater expert.” I talk about this more in chapter three.

presents itself to consciousness without filtering it or ordering it through desire. But doesn't that mean not doing anything whatsoever, a critic might ask? Quite the contrary. Occupying space mindfully, without desire, is not at all a passive act: it describes the effort of calming the mind and opening the senses, the effort to not order or analyze (immediately), to not dominate, to not *help*, but rather to receive, to mindfully observe others' acts of expression, and to allow the encounter to make a mark upon one's own body. It describes a profoundly intimate relationship with the world which simultaneously avoids trying to control or own it. This is what I strive for in my participation with zAmya in rehearsals (with varying degrees of success), and it is what I will extrapolate from in chapter five to suggest a different model for making theater for social change altogether.

To further elaborate this point for a moment, though, I want to share with you something that playwright Suzan-Lori Parks said during a keynote speech at the University of Minnesota in the spring of 2008.⁶⁶ She was discussing her creative process and, in so many words, she said that she listened to the universe, and wrote down the stories it told her. A few days later in a graduate theater seminar I was taking, Parks' speech was mentioned – she was being criticized by several members of the class for being hopelessly naïve and refusing to acknowledge the labor involved in the writing process. I think these critics missed her point entirely. Parks was discussing a labor, but it wasn't the labor of writing she was illustrating, it was the labor of *listening*. Listening to the universe involves being still and quiet for a moment, of balancing the energies that are directed outwards and the ones that are directed inwards. It also means

⁶⁶ Parks gave the Esther Freier Endowed Lecture on March 26, 2008 at Ted Mann Concert Hall in Minneapolis, MN, as part of a month-long series of events honoring her work.

acknowledging that you aren't the only one with something to say (admittedly, a difficult endeavor in some graduate seminars). Listening to the universe has a lot to do with not-doing to it.

Parks' listening seems to take place in what Tibetan Buddhist Chögyam Trungpa describes here as the first moment of perception:

When we see an object, in the first instant there is a sudden perception which has no logic or conceptualization to it at all; we just perceive the thing in the open ground. Then immediately we panic and begin to rush about trying to add something to it, either trying to find a name for it or trying to find pigeonholes in which we could locate and categorize it. Gradually things develop from there. (qtd. in Levin 402)

I'm interested in lingering in this first moment of perception, in this "open ground" that Trungpa describes. As a director, lingering in the open ground might mean creating the opportunities for an actor to make organic, responsive choices rather than bulldozing her around the space like a chess piece – it could mean listening intently and with care to the human inhabitants of the space rather than forcing them to adhere to the vision the director has developed (usually by him or herself) for the production. As an ethnographer, that lingering could mean deciding to open myself up as a space for the other participants to make an impression upon, as Conquergood suggests, rather than trying to immediately catalog or order the experience into something that feels familiar to me. Cataloging or ordering is really a kind of grasping, a way of making the uncertainties in life (appear to be) secure – grasping happens out of fear or nervousness, or from learned habits, and it creates distance between people. Parks' listening, Trungpa's experience in the open ground, and my own notion of not-doing all point

toward the same objective: to loosen the grasping tendencies that our consciousness performs upon the uncertainties of everyday life.

It is probably easy enough to describe or even practice this kind of perception in the open ground in the rehearsal space as an ethnographer or director, but what happens when I set about trying to write-up the results of my observations for an academic or popular audience? How can I maintain the practice of *not-doing*, how can I linger in the open ground, when I narrativize in my writing as well? For isn't the write-up itself the very rushing about and naming and categorizing that Trungpa cautions us about? Historiographer Michel de Certeau voices a related concern when he warns against "forc[ing] the silent body to speak" (*Writing* 3). Although de Certeau is speaking specifically about the practice of writing history (of writing the body made silent by history), it seems sage advice for ethnographers, who write the lived experience of the present, as well. If we ethnographers force the body to speak in our writing, it may well speak untruths under duress, or tell us only what we wish to hear from it. Despite our best intentions, "deciphering" or "decoding" the body in our writing can do damage (3). The last thing I want to do is use my writing to damage zAmya's participants, many of whom have already been damaged by society.

It seems like an impossible task, to write in such a way that the lived body is not entrapped, ordered, stabilized, made to mean. But perhaps the beginnings of an answer to forcing bodies to speak in our writing can be found in the field of performance ethnography, whose hallmark is the engagement with the *movement* of bodies or, as Conquergood suggests, the "processes of becoming" (qtd. in Madison 166). Rather than a more traditional ethnography which situates the ethnographer as simultaneously

outsider to and resident expert upon a culture and its traditions, performance ethnographer Cindy Garcia recommends a practice that notices and critiques “the intricacies of the movement of bodies through space, the choreographies, the entrances and exits, the groupings and ungroupings, the hierarchies that manifest as spatial relations, the discrepancies in usual movement patterns” (Garcia). Describing bodies runs the risk of stabilizing them in place and time; describing *movement* might be a way to allow bodies to remain in process, in a state of becoming. Describing movement, in exquisitely local detail, might allow us to retain the uncertainty and potentiality of the present moment in our writing (Denning 17).

To write the uncertainty of the present moment into our ethnographies moves writing away from the task of representation, and demands that it make of itself a space for encounter. It brings observer and observed together in the same space, and although it encourages a kind of dialogue between the two, it can never dispute the fact that the former is the author and the latter the one being written about. However, rather than the distance engendered when the ethnographer positions herself as expert of and voice for those observed, performance ethnography allows the ethnographer herself to acknowledge and critique her own authorial presence. Most importantly, this method of engagement permits the ethnographer to discuss the way she is moved and marked by the experience “in the open ground,” and to document those markings in her writing.

I will conclude this chapter with an attempt at this very kind of ethnography, which encounters first and explores potential meanings, with mindfulness, later. It is part of my ongoing attempt to practice non-attachment in the theater space, to let

zAmya's theater *be done* to me, rather than trying to force it to bend to my artistic or intellectual will.

Big Daddy's Story

September 2008. Minneapolis. Bedlam Theatre is hosting zAmya for an hour in the afternoon. The event is called a co-creative workshop: zAmya actors and invited guests have come together to brainstorm ideas for the upcoming road show. As I bustle in to the lobby of the theater, Lecia Grossman, zAmya's founder and ardent cheerleader, grabs me in a big hug (I'm late. I'm flustered. I hate being late.). I give Lecia a quick squeeze and disentangle from her, then slink into the theater through a huge red velvet curtain, trying not to crash the improvisation exercise already in progress. About twenty people stand on the stage, waiting expectantly, their eyes darting around the room. Two-thirds of them hold their arms in the air, palms against another pair of hands. The other third of them hover individually underneath the "house" created by the two pairs of outstretched arms above them. As I slip across the corner of the stage and up into the stadium-style audience seats, someone squeals "Inhabitants!" and the room explodes into noise and movement as the people under the arms break away from their group and scurry maniacally around the room to find another "house" to occupy.

I plunk down on a chair and pull out my laptop. I watch as, after the warm-up game concludes, the large group of about 20 people is subdivided to work on scenes or some other kind of creative response to the two main issues of this year's road show, which Maren outlines as: 1) the foreclosure crisis and 2) what the actors are coming to understand as the theft of original Native lands at Minnesota's "founding." zAmya

members Big Daddy, Josina, Maren, and Crystal each lead a group of invited guests, helping guide them through the creative process but depending upon their input to supply the content of the scenes. Each group has been given a specific topic to explore through performance research: credit histories, prison records, loan officers, Native treaties. The groups retreat, each one to a separate corner of the stage, and begin their work.

Toward the end of the hour, the groups are ready to perform the scenarios they have just created impromptu. Big Daddy's group goes first: they have been brainstorming on the topic of credit histories, and they have imagined/recalled a scenario before the present day, an event in the historical background of today's racialized credit market. Maren introduces Big Daddy and reminds the audience of the group's topic, then steps aside.

Big Daddy speaks:

"My grandfather in a cotton field." And Big Daddy illustrates his grandfather's body by vigorously bending a fellow actor's body to the floor. The body leans from the waist, flops violently, and freezes, the face obscured.

"My grandmother right there beside him." Big Daddy pushes another torso toward the floor, and it dangles there beside the first.

"My mother with a sack on her back and a watermelon under her arm." Hmph, goes another body. It teeters under the weight, this history.

"My kid sister playing in the fields with a watermelon rind." The last actor sits a ways off from the rest, chewing gum and looking listlessly about. I can't tell if she's acting.

“And I have to see this as my parents work day by day by day by day by day for nothing. How can they sing to a god that is supposed to be their savior?”

And then Big Daddy sings. Scratchy, mournful tones. A hymn? He stands among his ancestors, his face half hidden in profile, and Big Daddy pours out this sound.

It stops me. I stop breathing. I stop typing. I stop worrying about myself.

I just listen.

I am struck.

As Big Daddy sings, a few members of the audience begin to clap along, slow, sharp, dirge-like sounds. He stops singing abruptly. The clapping trails off, as though it is embarrassed. I don't hear the last words he says. I lurch forward in my seat but I miss them. He turns and swaggers back upstage, the withered bodies re-inflate into standing positions, and the audience applauds, meekly, as though they are paralyzed. I notice Maren has been watching with her mouth gaping open. We are all, in our own way, struck.

And at this point I must hesitate. I am moving from experiencing Big Daddy's performance in the open ground, as Trungpa would say, to the moment of analysis. I don't want to “explain” Big Daddy's performance, and I certainly don't feel qualified to speak for him. So I will speak the only shaky truths that I can – my own memories and the way this experience left its trace on me . . .

In that moment, in the hush after Big Daddy's grand exodus, I shared in a sense of profound on-the-verge-ness that seemed to be floating in the air. It seemed as though nobody quite knew what to do, and this sense of momentary paralysis felt important.

The performance had induced its audience to receive it in the open ground, to listen without trying to form the experience into something more familiar or easy to consume. For those of us in the audience who might be called privileged, I think we realized we couldn't *help*, we could only be struck, faced with our own failure as members of a society, *indicted*. It occurred to me that this was precisely what characterized the performance as "activist."

Another thing I found so memorable about this event was the way that Big Daddy appropriated the art form. When Big Daddy pushed those torsos to the ground and left them hanging in a limp row, I think he was radically re-interpreting Boal's Image Theater exercises. With Boal, you do a sculpture or make an image with bodies and then everyone stands back and reflects upon it – the making of the art work and the practice of assigning meaning to it are separated. But Big Daddy's sculpting *was* the scene - when Big Daddy sculpted, it was not an exercise, not a rehearsal, it was a performance of violence which made gestures of power visible. When he bent the grandfather's body to the ground of the cotton field, I saw white privilege and authority in Big Daddy's own body. I did not have to think about what this gesture *meant* – the experience struck me, directly. Big Daddy's improvisation was not commenting on racial oppression, it was repeating it. And somehow it seemed that by repeating that gesture of authority he was displaying his own empowerment, the power of the act of *naming* the world, of narrativizing it, of saying *this is how it is*. The *this* of Daddy's performance was utterly complex. When he sang, I had the impression that Big Daddy's physical presence was wavering between a representation of his ancestors and his own present body; then those two poles suddenly blurred when I realized that his

ancestors are *in* his body, in his genes and in his embodied historical memory. What is often thought of as a distant past (we don't do *that* anymore) became painfully apparent in the present moment, in Big Daddy's body which still carries the wound of historical oppression but also the power of the gesture of naming.

The art-making itself was political – it did not precede a political effort, it *enacted* it. The social change effected here is not necessarily that I have acquired more information (actionable intelligence? The 2009 Christmas Day bombing episode is fresh in my mind) about homelessness, it is that Big Daddy's story-telling has left an indelible mark upon my consciousness and upon my actions. I will never forget this moment, how Big Daddy's performance was more captivating than anything I'd ever seen on a "professional" stage, how people telling their own stories (real or imagined or some mix of the two) pierces the experience of the theatrical event in a way that representational staging methodologies can rarely hope to achieve, how I began to feel implicated and responsible for what had happened. *How can this be?* Big Daddy's performance asked me, forcing me to come up with answers rather than supplying them to me. And indeed, I begin to ask myself: How much easier is it for me to get a job? How much more access have I had to education and the arts? What am I using these advantages to do? If there is social change happening here, it is that Big Daddy has compelled me (and others like me) to be aware of my privilege, and to be consciously involved in thinking of ways in which I can personally contribute to creating a more equitable society.

Reflecting on Narrativizing Tactics

My experience with zAmya convinces me once again that civically-engaged theater should be less about the privileged helping the underprivileged, and more about those of us with privilege entering the space of others with humility, as Conquergood says, quoting Frederick Douglass, and undertaking our own awakening to the oppressions we might perpetrate upon others. Those of us with privilege need to transform ourselves, not others, and it is a mindful attitude toward the performance which led me to this conclusion, an attitude created by existing in the rehearsal and performance spaces in contemplation, in an attitude of not-doing. If I had *not* assumed a mindful attitude toward the performance, I might have asked: how can I help Big Daddy? (that is, how can I order the world outside of me to make me feel more comfortable with my own privilege?) Instead, I asked: how can I change myself? How can I receive and submit to the indictment the performance leveled at me? I cannot write a check and feel better, I cannot “fix” the homeless and thus rid myself of the guilt that others suffer while I lead a comfortable life; I have to transform the way I encounter people who’ve had different life experiences than I have. It is my responsibility. And this is what I mean by letting theater *be done* to me, rather than *doing* theater for social change.

Hopefully the intention of my narrativizing was made clear within the vignette and its analysis: that I wished to engage in a self-reflective *receiving* of the experience of Big Daddy’s story. But there is one question I posed to zAmya’s actors’ narrativizing tactics in the middle section of this chapter that I have yet to answer of my own storytelling: what or who gets erased by my narrativizing? I am thinking

specifically of how the *Little House* actors, after hearing the first half of the script, actively lobbied for the second half of the script to narrate a success story. And, in fact, I find myself doing the same thing. The story I chose to relate from this workshop was decidedly a success story – Big Daddy’s story was stunning, emotionally rich, technically complex, and resonant with multiple meanings. It also allowed me to articulate a rationale for being in the space without the desire to change it, a new way of engaging with theater for social change. However, focusing on Big Daddy’s story caused me to ignore other stories that were being told in the room. De Certeau advises the historiographer to visit “zones of silence” (79), and in my effort to pay attention to what was “right there” (Cohen-Cruz, *Local* 8), I shied away from some of those zones. I could have used my writing to narrativize absence, for instance, by pointing out that Ed (an actor I have written about extensively in previous chapters) didn’t arrive at this workshop until it was nearly over. Where was he? Why wasn’t he as actively involved in the co-creative event as Big Daddy? Why didn’t he come to the facilitation training sessions that Maren held, and that Corey, Big Daddy, and Larry attended? I can’t answer these questions because it didn’t seem important at the time to ask them, so blown away was I by the impact of Big Daddy’s performance. So even though my narrativizing reveals certain zones of silence (it is doubtful that Big Daddy would ever be asked to perform on, say, the Guthrie’s stages), it still engages in acts of erasure.⁶⁷

Perhaps all narrativizing does – perhaps that is a quintessential characteristic of

⁶⁷ The choice to include Big Daddy’s story instead of Ed’s verges on what Laura Edmondson calls “academic sugarcoating,” or searching for a ray of hope or act of agency in the most dire circumstances to soothe my conscience about the suffering of others (7). However, even though the story I chose to relate is a success story in terms of how I am defining efficacy in civically-engaged theater, it also reflects on the value of lingering with my discomfort and implication in the history Big Daddy narrativized. In any event, Edmondson’s caution to scholars to avoid searching for (or creating where there is none) a happy ending is well-heeded.

narrativizing: to order events is always to make choices (or to have choices made for you, as dictated by cultural mythologies and ideological tropes), including some events and excluding others.

And so this finally leads me back to Trungpa. Perhaps he is not suggesting that we avoid naming, categorizing, narrativizing, but that we do so with mindfulness, as a result of receiving rather than as a knee-jerk reaction, as a gesture of being in an intimate relationship with the world rather than as an attempt to create safe distances between ourselves and the objects of our naming. This turns naming from representation (that is, deferral) into direct encounter, a naming which, like Big Daddy's performative naming of racism, like Freire's naming of oppression, creates opportunities for transformation.

Chapter Five Toward an Intimacy of Social Change

This chapter both concludes and looks forward. Throughout the dissertation, I have mentioned instances in which a kind of intimacy was achieved at zAmya, in the way that audience members spatialized themselves into performance, or in the way that affect was expressed by one actor and then picked up and “hooked into” by another actor. I also implicitly questioned whether intimacy and narrativizing were mutually exclusive acts, but concluded that narrativizing could be, as Trungpa says, an “encounter in the open ground,” and, as such, an intimate event. In this chapter, I will draw on these examples from zAmya’s production history to theorize what I am calling an intimacy of social change, and argue that it provides a new way to assess theater’s efficacy.

I choose intimacy as a way to negotiate enframing. No matter how important the activist message (or content) of civically-engaged theater, if it doesn’t redefine the relationship between performer and spectator, it runs the risk of falling back into an architecture that encourages the act of enframing, the act of grasping and objectifying with the gaze that tends to occur in proscenium spaces or while we watch television (a practice which then “bleeds out” and also informs other everyday encounters). Enframing is the characteristic of our looking that turns people into things. Buddhist meditation practice, late Heideggerian philosophy, and other postmodern phenomenologies (such as those articulated by Bert States and Stanton B. Garner, to name a few who write about performance) all theorize a method of encounter that nullifies the grasping power of the gaze and its inherent subject/object hierarchy – all

three support radical presencing, or uninhibited acceptance of the present moment. Theorizing theater through this lens turns the performance event from one in which the audience enframes the performers, turning bodies into things, to one in which more equitable intersubjective encounters may happen between humans.

In the first section of this chapter, I will define intimacy in terms of Buddhist philosophy and Heideggerian phenomenology. I have written about intimacy in the theater previously, but am deepening the meaning of the concept here to indicate a relational state characterized by closeness without grasping. In the second section, I take this definition of intimacy and use it as a lens to look back over the sites theorized previously in the dissertation – spatializing gestures, affective circuits, and narrative acts – to pinpoint when intimacy was present at zAmya and when it was not. I propose to use intimacy as a marker of efficacy in the theater, especially when intimacy disrupts the ability of dominant, or capitalist, space to turn every human interaction into a market transaction. In the last section, I introduce the beginnings of a manifesto describing what a theater fully committed to an intimacy of social change might look like. This last section is a series of suggestions, or provocations, for the community-based theater maker who is interested in producing a performance event in the contemplative tradition.

Intimacy

In a conference paper I wrote in 2007, I began thinking about the significance of intimacy at the theater.⁶⁸ One of the things I was intrigued by in that paper was the

⁶⁸ This paper was then revised and published on the popular community forum *Community Arts Network*, Feb. 2008.

paradoxical nature of an intimacy, or a seemingly private encounter, occurring in a public space like the theater, and geared toward a public/social transformation. I was interested in revealing the ways that social change could occur in the intensely local space between bodies, rather than in a broader context like “the economy.” In that paper, I suggested that intimacy was a state through which audience members and actors could pass in order to see each other with new eyes. I also drew on Heidegger’s notion of dwelling, which describes a way of interacting with other people and the natural world in a way that avoids grasping or controlling them, and instead produces a gesture of *letting-be* (*Poetry* 149). The paper was focused on the ways that zAmya was succeeding in achieving intimacy in the theater space, and so I spent considerable time documenting instances where this kind of new seeing occurred in both rehearsal and performances of zAmya’s show *Ten You Win/Ten You Lose*. I continue to pursue many of the same goals in this dissertation, but I also intend to now deepen the meaning of intimacy, and its implications for the community-based theater event.

Although I do utilize scholarship in Buddhist studies to inform this theoretical lens (particularly contemporary interpretations of and commentary on the Pali cannon, the ancient texts which are said to be the most original inscription of the Buddha’s teachings), much of what I am drawing from are simple dharma talks (or in Pali, dhamma), both those I heard while practicing with a Buddhist community in Minneapolis and which I continue to listen to as podcasts now that I live in another state, and texts written by contemporary teachers and spiritual leaders. Buddhism has decidedly taken hold in the West, and many of the teachers and scholars that I cite are American Buddhists; many of these have trained in the East, but many have also

returned to the United States to teach. It is decidedly a *borrowed* tradition that I am engaging with, and I certainly do not discount the possibility that American Buddhism is just another colonial appropriation of another culture's spiritual traditions. But I can't help thinking that it is precisely the West that could most benefit from learning a contemplative practice, from learning a way to interrupt the process of enframing that Heidegger describes as an indicative factor of the age of technology, and which pervades social relations in the West. So despite a certain amount of trepidation, I move forward with this project, which is to articulate a definition for intimacy based on Buddhist philosophy which can function as a guideline for making community-based theater in a more conscientious and efficacious manner.

I will start by describing the concept of non-attachment. In Buddhism, the notion of self is seen as a construct, an illusion. As Buddhist scholar Andrew Olendzki says, ". . . all nouns are arbitrary constructions. A person, place or thing is just an idea invented to freeze the fluid flow of the world into objects that can be labeled and manipulated by adroit but shallow modes of mind" ("Self"). The notion of self, or ego, or "I" causes suffering: we grasp and hold onto the notion of self because we cannot bring ourselves to surrender to the notion that the universe is one "seamless and dynamic unity" of which we are a part (Snelling 27). This is the most important point: the *grasping* onto the idea of self (or any other idea) is itself the cause of suffering.

To relieve the suffering produced by grasping onto the illusion of self, Buddhists use meditation practice. Mark Nunberg, guiding teacher in the Vipassana tradition at Common Ground Meditation Center in Minneapolis, describes intimacy as what one should aspire to during sitting meditation. Intimacy is achieved by "dropping selfing,"

by relinquishing our attachments to the experience of the present moment and just watching the breath or the movement of our thoughts (Nunberg, “Energy”). Nunberg describes meditation practice as surrender, but, paradoxically, it is an act of surrender which allows the meditator to become more intimate with the present moment. Nunberg calls this love: an intimacy without grasping. Intimacy has the quality of bare attention, or radical openness, to what is happening in the present moment. Intimacy happens when we realize, “ah, *this* is how it is.”⁶⁹ Intimacy is the opposite of owning, controlling, ordering, labeling; intimacy is, as Chögyam Trungpa says, an encounter in the open ground (Levin 402).

This is the goal (inasmuch as one can speak of goals in Buddhism) of a meditation practice: to be “intimate with life without grasping it” (Nunberg, “Understanding”). Intimacy without grasping, or non-attachment, involves being close with life, with its pleasures as well as its pain, without making an object of one’s experiences, without attaching personal desires to experience. Nunberg talked about the skillfulness involved in being able to enjoy a neighbor’s garden without attaching to desires such as “Oh, if only I could get *my* garden to look like that.” In Buddhism, desire is the source of all suffering, but its opposite, detachment or aversion, is not the key to living freely either. Intimacy without grasping, then, is a manner of entering into the experience of life without trying to own it or control it, without trying to cling to it or push it away. A conscious meditation practice cultivates the ability to experience the ever-shifting nature of life, its irrefutable impermanence.

⁶⁹ This is one of Nunberg’s oft-repeated mantras, and one that has really helped crack open the practice for me personally. He suggests noticing, “This is how it is. Can this be ok?”

Buddhists often talk about being able to see things as they “really” are.

Although this might appear to assign a troubling essentialism to “reality,” I think the goal of the practice is for each person to be able to encounter lived experience as it occurs, rather than having a sort of virtual existence, where a preconceived idea about something replaces direct encounter. Vipassana meditation teacher Cynthia Thatcher describes seeing what is really there by comparing it to her experience of looking at Georges Seurat’s pointillist masterpiece, “A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte.” She describes the difference between noticing the individual little splotches of paint on the canvas, and then pulling back and allowing all those splotches to combine into an image of a dog or a lady’s parasol or the water. What actually *is*, Thatcher argues, can be compared to the splotch of paint – then the mind performs an operation on it to turn it into a dog, a parasol (“Disconnect”). It is not that the splotches are good or right, and the parasol bad or wrong, but the point of meditation practice is to differentiate between the two kinds of experience, between bare attention and meaning-making. A bhikkhu in the Thai Forest tradition, Ajahn Sumedho describes the importance of seeing what “is” in his discussion of the four noble truths articulated by the Buddha, the second of which teaches that the cause of suffering is attachment to desire. Sumedho says: “Things are as they are, so we can recognize and appreciate them in their changing forms without grasping. Grasping is wanting to hold on to something we like; wanting to get rid of something we don’t like; or wanting to get something we don’t have” (“Four” 21). To see things as they are is to be intimate with lived experience as it shifts and changes, rather than clinging to some idea of how things “should be.” Another meditation instruction Nunberg offers is, “practice being

undefended,” which characterizes the action of opening to or of being intimate with a moment of lived experience. Environmental philosopher David L. Barnhill, writing about consumerism and advocating for a link between Buddhist spirituality and social justice work, describes mindfulness meditation as a way of, not overcoming the feeling of helplessness that accompanies social justice work, but of *lingering* with it: mindfulness in this situation becomes the act of “entering into the sadness of things” (61).

I have repeated all these descriptions of intimacy in the tradition of the on-going dhamma talk, where teachers will say the same teaching in a variety of different ways with the understanding that different articulations will resonate with different listeners. Thinking of intimacy from these multiple perspectives also helps me avoid stabilizing it into an absolute truth, but to remember that intimacy without grasping or clinging is simply the awareness of the continuously changing nature of life.

Yet another way to think about intimacy is by reference to Martin Heidegger’s late philosophy.⁷⁰ Heidegger described a practice which he alternately called meditative thinking or *Gelassenheit*, a practice which is incompatible with, and therefore disrupts, the conquering gaze of enframing (enframing is Heidegger’s word for the objectifying gaze which “goes forth and conquers” which I described in chapter one). *Gelassenheit* translates roughly as “letting-be” or “releasement toward things.” Rather than a gaze which thrusts forth and grasps, *Gelassenheit* is an attitude which

⁷⁰ Heidegger does not explicitly pay homage to any eastern religious tradition, even though philosopher Tomonobu Imamichi has accused Heidegger of lifting the notion of *Dasein* (the central argument in *Being and Time*) from Kakuzo Okakura’s *The Book of Tea*, which reflects on various aspects of Japanese culture, including Zen and the tea ceremony (*In Search* 123). Although this is certainly a topic for further research, it is not my aim to castigate Heidegger here (plagiarism being perhaps the least of his offenses), but to utilize what I find to be especially useful language for a discussion of social formations in the theater space.

receives, which actively waits without willing. As the Teacher articulates in “Conversations on a Country Path,” rather than creating a world of objects (representations) with our thinking, “In waiting we leave open what we are waiting for” (Heidegger *Discourse* 68). Meditative thinking’s main concern is to receive the world in its givenness. Regardless of one’s feelings about the legitimacy of an argument concerned with the essential qualities of Being, Heidegger provides us with a model for social being-with which practices radical *acceptance*.

Philosopher David Michael Levin takes up Heidegger’s notion of *Gelassenheit* as well as Buddhist teachings to theorize a practice of vision(ing) that attempts to obviate the violence engendered by enframing. Levin brings the reader’s attention, phenomenologically, to the fact that seeing is not only a receptive act, but also a gesture of giving, as in the term “giving reception to.” He provokes the reader to contemplate the nature of his or her own vision, to ask whether it is possible to perform a kind of vision or looking that is neither passive nor willful, but that has the quality of care-taking (Levin 63, 236). Levin’s, via Heidegger’s, description of letting-be contains the same quality as Nunberg’s articulation of intimacy, that is, dispassion or non-attachment, but it also introduces an element very dear to the heart of Buddhist philosophy: compassion.⁷¹ Levin says: “Letting-be is an interested looking which cares; it is a being-with which cares; it is a response-ability to the presencing of Being which lets it come forth, lets it be present, *without* needing to master and dominate its presence” (245). What Levin calls care-taking is a far cry from what I called “helping” in the last chapter – a vision concerned with care-taking is an act of compassion and,

⁷¹ “In Buddhism the highest spiritual ideal is to cultivate compassion for all sentient beings and to work for their welfare to the greatest possible extent” (H.H. Dalai Lama *Universe* 10).

coupled with non-attachment, describes an ethical social relationship predicated on an open heart and a calm mind.

What I appreciate most about Levin's theories are the way he draws on postmodern thinkers like Lyotard and Foucault, but is also concerned with defining an ethics of looking (through phenomenological engagement with direct experience) in the hopes of stimulating a more just social world. But Levin goes a step further and searches for techniques for performing this kind of receptive looking, as in the following example. In an effort to explain compassionate visioning, Levin cites literary theorist Jean Paris here, who is writing about painting by drawing on Lyotard's critique of perspective. The value of this practice arises out of the *doing* of it, rather than only talking about it. This is crucial to understand about Buddhist teachings as well – words are only a finger pointed at the experience, not the experience itself. Here is Paris' exercise:

. . . 'set your eyes on a [single, fixed] point for a long time, and let laterally come to you, without turning towards it, all that is eliminated by the prehensile, secondary, organized vision' – and soon, 'instead of the rectangular, stabilized, constant, central space of the foveal vision,' you will discover 'this curved twilight, evanescent, lateral space,' the space of the truth. (Paris qtd. in Levin 240)

Go ahead, take a break from reading this text and *do* the looking exercise. Do you see how the welcoming gaze, the gaze which allows more of the world to flood gently into your perception, constitutes the world as dimensional and curved, rather than as a world of square surfaces, screens, confrontations? The twilight space at the margins of vision, which is experienced when we commit to a relaxed, softly-focused looking, is a space normally overlooked when we engage in the kind of looking

cultivated by dominant space, a kind of looking epitomized by the stare (and, I would argue, the kind of looking generated by the proscenium theater space).⁷² Moreover, the twilight space reveals our own bodies in the world we are looking at – it reminds us we are implicated. The twilight space at the margins of vision is the space of intimacy, of receiving experience without grasping it, dominating it. An intimacy of social change involves, among other things, cultivating this kind of looking.

My proposal, then, is this: to allow intimacy to be treated as a marker of efficacy in community-based, and other kinds of civically-engaged, theater. As opposed to Boal's legislative theater, which treats the passing of laws or other large-scale social or economic gestures as the marker of success, a civically-engaged theater seeking an intimacy of social change is radically small-scale, it looks for quiet moments of awakening, fleeting glimpses of bare attention, of the realization "*this* is how it is."⁷³ An intimacy of social change has occurred when audience members enter into sadness (as Barnhill says) rather than try to eradicate it or control it, or when they practice Levin's welcoming, compassionate gaze by dropping the stare which objectifies or enframes. Intimacy's efficacy becomes visible when it produces a tremor in dominant space, a small malfunction in capitalism's efforts to turn us into buying- or objectifying-machines.

⁷² Levin's phenomenological musings on the nature of the stare are fascinating, and include the observation that even though "staring is an attempt to dominate," the object of the stare soon escapes: "instead of stability and fixation at the far end of the gaze, we find a chaos of shifting, jerking forms, as the object of focus violently tears itself away from the hold of the gaze" (69).

⁷³ I don't think there's anything wrong with legislative theater, I am simply proposing another means of assessment for, and another methodology for enacting, civically-engaged theater. As Boal himself has said, "the world of theater is large enough to accommodate all theatrical forms" (*Legislative* 20).

In the next section, I will discuss how intimacy constitutes the visible, or perhaps felt, marker of efficacy in all three labors I have been talking about in this dissertation: spatializing gestures, affective circuits, and narrative acts. We can tell that *spatializing* is “working” or productive when intimacy exists, when the gesture of spatializing draws its spectators into a state of being-with. Otherwise, spatializing produces a colonizing gesture, it occupies territories and displaces or objectifies bodies. We can tell that *affect* is flowing in circuits when it creates intimacy, when it produces the welcoming gaze or the realization “this is how it is” – efficacious affective flow is not about “feeling good,” it is rather about being aware of feeling, or of letting affect trigger and be expressed, without trying to mask it or manage it to serve a particular ideological construct (like Hochschild’s airline worker). Finally, intimacy occurs when participants *narrativize* by dictating the terms of their own engagement with the storytelling project rather than falling prey to the shoulds and the ought tos. A narrative act which makes the realization, “this is how it is,” not in order to verify reality or affirm objectivity but in order to surrender to the impermanence of lived experience, is an instance of intimacy.

In each of these cases, intimacy is a negotiation with dominant space, space which orders, calculates, categorizes, and alienates (Lefebvre 53; Heidegger *Question* 129; Trungpa *Cutting* 122; Chaudhuri 19). Intimacy becomes a radical force when it temporarily disrupts the ability of capitalism to once again turn bodies into objects, and instead produces encounters in the open ground (Trungpa 122). If intimacy accomplishes anything toward solving the problem of homelessness, it is by interrupting the process of objectification which dehumanizes those experiencing homelessness. As

such, an intimacy of social change in the theater is directed ultimately toward awakening those who sit in the audience, those who either implicitly or explicitly participate in behaviors that keep the underprivileged in a state of subordination in society.⁷⁴ In this sense, the intensely private practice of intimacy, of opening to the present moment, is an act of care for the self as much as for others. As Andrew Olendzki says in a note accompanying his translation of the Sedaka Sutta, which tells the story of an acrobat's skill and attention in walking the tightrope with his assistant clinging to his back: "Insight meditation is not a selfish undertaking, because the quality of our interaction with all those around us depends on the degree of our own self-understanding and self-control" ("Sedaka"). In this sense, an act of personal mindfulness, or intimacy with the present moment, is an endowment to our community, a commitment to compassionate living and equitable existence for all.

Intimacy at zAmya

Now that I've described the parameters of intimacy as it exists in the Buddhist tradition and in Heideggerian phenomenology, I'd like to briefly return to a few representative vignettes from chapters two, three, and four in order to demonstrate when intimacy was present and when it wasn't. This section functions as both a conclusion for the dissertation, as well as a reframing of some of the events I've described previously in terms of the definition of intimacy I've just articulated. At the end of each of these review segments, I ask a question, a provocation which will help to set up the last section of the chapter, in which I lay out a series of suggestions for creating

⁷⁴ It is not my intention to create a binary here between the privileged and the underprivileged – dominant space can colonize the behaviors of many different groups of people.

meditative theater, that is, a theater whose main goal is to create an intimacy of social change. The driving impetus behind my interest in articulating this kind of a theater is to combat the effects of what I described in chapter one and elsewhere as the pathological visuality, formed by and conforming to dominant space, which turns all relationships into market transactions – Heidegger’s calculative thinking and enframing, Buddhism’s clinging or grasping, and Levin’s stare all describe the operation which an intimacy of social change in the theater is designed to subvert.

First, chapter two extolled the virtues of thinking theater in terms of spatializing gestures rather than simply as a representational field. One of the vignettes I related early in that chapter was designed to critique what I was calling representational violence. I described the time that a casting switch was made during *There’s No Place Like Home*: an African-American actor was replaced by a white actress in the role of the Bad Witch in order to avoid perpetuating racist stereotypes. I suggested that perhaps the casting switch did not really solve any problems at all, and that instead, the original casting choice might have allowed the audience to linger with the pain that racism produces (as Barnhill says, entering into its sadness) rather than erasing it from view. This suggestion was actually a suggestion for intimacy, a suggestion that asking the audience to surrender to the experience of how painful racism is, of bringing bare attention to how racist images are constantly perpetuated by our media sources, might help the production enter into rather than create distance between the spectators and the experience of racism. Welcoming the experience allows for dialogue, even if it is painful, whereas erasing it (as was effectively done with the casting switch) prevents

that dialogue from occurring. In my opinion, the casting switch missed the opportunity for intimacy.

In fact, the main focus of chapter two was on a theoretical device which might produce just this kind of bare attention. To use Garner's spatializing gestures as a lens through which to analyze a theatrical production is to do just this: to just watch the bodies, without attempting to conquer them in a meaning-making gesture, a dominating gesture, but just to see what they are doing. This is an intimate way of engaging with the performance, and it is very different than reading the performance as a visual field filled with signs, which inherently creates a distance between spectator and performance event, and effectively succeeds in objectifying the actors. Watching the performance as a series of spatializing gestures constructs the theater event as an encounter. And indeed, audience members have approached zAmya's performances in just this way. I am thinking specifically of the woman in the audience who called out to Dorothy and the Scarecrow "Take the number 6!" as they were deliberating which mode of transportation to take to get to the government center. What qualifies this as an intimate encounter is the way the woman in the audience surrendered to the lived experience of being part of the story: being undefended, she responded directly to the narrative line rather to some preconceived notion of what an audience member is supposed to act like (obedient, silent). As we say in the acting profession, she was in the moment, a phrase that exactly describes the state of intimacy with lived experience as understood in Buddhist philosophy. Although this moment happened on a lark, it is not isolated, and on occasion other audience members have spatialized themselves into the performance or workshop too. *But what would it mean to make this a specific goal of the*

production: to invite audiences to observe spatializing gestures with bare attention, rather than using their gaze to turn the bodies before them into representational objects? Would this help them to participate in an intimate way, to cross the boundary which separates them from the narrative and surrender to the present moment of the performance?

Next, chapter three was about affect. I assessed the theater event as efficacious when affect was free to trigger and be expressed in the body, and when affect and emotion flowed in circuits, as opposed to when they were managed, as Arlie Hochschild says. An example of an affective circuit was the moment during *Little House* rehearsals when Arminta forgot a line and whispered desperately for help, showing her fear in her body. The plea was picked up by Ed, who fed her the line with kindness and generosity plain to see on his face, effectively creating an affective circuit. The contrasting example I related in that chapter, where affect was suppressed or failed to flow in a circuit, also included Arminta, but this time in a post-show discussion when an audience member virtually demanded that Arminta reveal personal details from her past. Arminta clammed up, the audience member pressed on, and but for Maren's gentle intervention the situation could have become positively confrontational.

Hochschild's theory of emotion management dovetails neatly into Nunberg's recommendation to meditators to "practice being undefended." To manage one's emotions is to remain defended from a perceived threat – it is to act, affectively, as one "should," often because that gesture is a survival tactic. Hochschild's airline worker who keeps a soothing smile plastered on her face even in the midst of terrifying turbulence or when confronted by abusive customers is a perfect example of someone

who manages her emotions in order to keep her job. In contrast, the airline worker who is intimate with the experience of imminent danger might not look quite so serene. Of course, we don't blame the airline worker, but rather the ideological constructs which enforce emotion management. Likewise, in the second zAmya example, I don't blame Arminta for refusing to engage in the affective circuit, nor really do I blame the audience member. I think the audience member was desperately trying to make the situation "feel better" to herself, a desire trained into her by complicated matrices of dominant space (including ideas about what it means to be charitable and what it means to be a woman, as well as a refusal to accept that her privilege gives her advantage), and thus she was in the grip of emotion management herself. This gripping could also be called, in Buddhist parlance, grasping or clinging, or in Heideggerian terminology, the attempt to order or rationalize. In contrast, an intimate encounter between the two women would have permitted both to become consciously aware of their fears and voice them: in other words, intimacy would have been the observable marker of an efficacious affective circuit. *How can the theater event provoke this kind of affective and emotional mindfulness in the post-show talkback and at other points in the performance event?*

Finally, chapter four described the way narratives came into being at zAmya. As I mentioned in that chapter, narrativizing can be a difficult act through which to encounter another in the open ground (as Trungpa says), because narrativizing is itself an ordering, a naming, a meaning-making, and thus seemingly opposed to the state of intimacy that Buddhist meditators aspire to. I'd like to return to the story I told about Suzan-Lori Parks' speech, though, to ask: Can narrativizing be the result of listening to

the universe intimately rather than an act of ordering the universe to comply with one's desires? Can narrativizing describe the discovery, "Ah, *this* is how it is!" rather than the desire, "This is how I want it (or need it) to be."? It seems counterintuitive, as though theater after this fashion doesn't allow for an imagining of alternatives, or any kind of social change at all. After all, the act of narrativizing, of naming the world, has the potential to empower those who have been narrativized unfairly by others, or even those who have merely played out dominant mythologies with no agency of their own – in fact, this is precisely what I was arguing was efficacious about the actors' activity in rehearsal. But is there a difference between when the actors narrativize and when the audience narrativizes? Let me explain.

Although narrativizing is an ordering of events, I suggested in the end of chapter four that it can still be accomplished with mindfulness, especially in the devising process where the often internal processes of story-making are spread throughout the rehearsal room among several bodies. In fact, the rehearsal process itself can be aptly compared to sitting meditation – both are events where special techniques are practiced in a comparably private (although for rehearsal, still a social) arena, which will later be used in a more public setting to interact with others. The warm-ups which begin every rehearsal are exactly exercises in increasing mindfulness, of the body, of breath, of the reach of one's own voice, of the others in the room. Warm-ups demechanize and limber the body, and make it prepared to interact in a more sensitive manner, to be more receptive to the present moment of lived experience, just as sitting meditation does. So in a sense, the rehearsal is perhaps the most likely site in the entire theatrical process for the intimate encounter which Buddhist mindfulness practice aspires to. The rehearsal is

quite often (though certainly not always) the very act of surrender and openness that Nunberg describes as the act of intimacy without grasping. The vignette I related in chapter three about the former gang chief is a prime example – this gentleman told a terribly personal story to a group of relative strangers in a workshop, in a way which truly recalled Nunberg’s mantra of “being undefended.” His manner, his own openness, inspired those of us witnessing to just sit and listen; we just took it. No one did anything about it. We, as Barnhill would say, entered into the sadness of this man’s story without trying to change it; or, as Conquergood would say, we were “impressed” by it, literally, the story made a dent upon its listeners.

But what happens when the audience doesn’t “just take it,” when the audience’s act of narrativizing becomes an act of grasping? I would suggest that this act of grasping is just what zAmya is attempting to combat. For example, when the privileged narrativize the homeless in a particular way – that they are to be avoided, to be feared, or even to be pitied, or to be helped, all responses which reflect dominant mythologies about homelessness – this creates an impenetrable distance between the two groups of people. This relationship was illustrated in the vignette I related about Arminta and the audience member who tried to get her to expose more details about her past “criminal” record. That audience member was not really seeing Arminta in front of her – the “facts” that she had been told about Arminta, that she had a criminal record, didn’t “add up” to the image of Arminta presented to her that day, that of a well-dressed, sophisticated, gentle African-American woman. And so the audience member was actively engaged in getting Arminta to explain herself, that is, she was attempting to re-narrativize the Arminta she saw before her into an Arminta that would “fit” the image

which dominant mythologies dictated and which the audience member had internalized. This woman's actions run counter to every definition of the intimate encounter I have described thus far in this chapter: surrender, openness, bare attention, letting-be, or a caring, welcoming gaze that does not dominate or master. So, the important question to move forward with in the next section becomes: *how can the theater event invite the audience to narrativize with more intimacy, with less grasping?*

In this section I've proposed three questions that I will use to propel the next, and final, section of the dissertation. Those questions, again, are: How can the production invite audience members to bring their bare attention to spatializing gestures in performance? How can the talk-back be made over into an intimate or mindful encounter, which includes a mindfulness of affect and emotion? How can the theater event invite the audience to narrativize with more intimacy, and with less grasping (both during the performance and much later)? This final section focuses specifically on the relationship between actors and audience members, which I perceive to be the most fertile location for an intimacy of social change.

Toward an Intimacy of Social Change in the Theater

A theater which is dedicated to an intimacy of social change takes as its mission the subversion of dominant space's efforts to turn humans into buying-machines. It subverts those efforts by creating the conditions for relationships to occur in ways other than the market relationships which so often condition even our most private exchanges. The recommendations which I present here for achieving an intimacy of social change are drawn from diverse sources: some are based on what is already working at zAmya,

some are based on other radical or activist theater practices, and some are based on models outside the discipline of theater altogether. The goal of this kind of theater is not to make people “happy” but to create encounters in the open ground, opportunities for “dropping in” to life.⁷⁵

Scholarship is often accused of operating in the abstract,⁷⁶ and so I wanted to close with a list of practical applications of the theories outlined in this dissertation. The practitioner in me, the one who makes theater, cannot help confessing to this ulterior motive, that this has been my question all along: what do I *do* as someone interested in making community-based and other kinds of civically engaged theater in order to achieve an intimacy of social change? These are my suggestions.

1. Shake up the architecture

Ditch the proscenium. Proscenium staging replicates the experience of watching television – it promotes what Heidegger calls enframing, or what Levin calls the stare. It divides actors from spectators, objectifying the former and creating passive yet seemingly authoritative consumers out of the latter. If you can’t work in an architectural configuration other than proscenium, then bring attention to the way it divides actors from audience members, creating a hierarchy. Some of my favorite moments at zAmya were when actors or the action “leaked” out of the proscenium or modified thrust staging they usually employ. During the circus scene in *Little House*, Marvin-as-tiger once ran out into the audience and grabbed a little old lady by the shoulders, roaring ferociously in her ear. His touch and her girlish peal of surprised and

⁷⁵ “Dropping in” is another of Mark Nunberg’s mantras – it describes the intimate encounter with lived experience.

⁷⁶ As Latour remarks grimly of Habermas: “not a single case study in the 500 pages of his masterwork . . .” (qtd. in Sandercock 13).

delighted laughter in return instantly changed the entire dynamic of the performance, from an event where one group of people passively observes another into an event which truly had the nature of an encounter or an interaction. This moment happened by “accident,” but theater makers can work to intentionally create these moments as well.⁷⁷

Leave the lights on. Plunging the audience into darkness gives them a safe retreat, it signals to them that they have no opportunity or obligation to enter into the experience of the performance unless they wish to break the rules. Leaving the lights on equalizes the social space – everyone in a lit room is a potential actor.

Stage the show galley style. Staging galley style (with the audience in two equal sections facing each other across the performance space) compels the audience to look at each other from time to time and certainly at the beginnings and ends of the performance. It constitutes the audience member as both one who looks and one who is looked upon – by being reflected in the opposite bank of audience seating, the audience sees themselves as “lookers” and brings awareness to the fact that “looking” is not innocent or neutral, but conditioned. This paves the way for a discussion of how the audience narrativizes the actors in the act of gazing.

Even better, stage the show a la promenade (or as Richard Schechner says, environmentally). Staging a la promenade means that there is no set bank of audience seating: the audience space and the performance space intermingle. It gives the audience choices about how they follow the story as they are left to drift through the

⁷⁷ This moment was a testament to Marvin’s skills in improvisation and ability to take advantage of this opportunity in performance. It also makes me think that academic training programs need to be re-structured to educate a different kind of actor, one who exists not only as a visual object for the audience to consume, but one who moves through a space of comingled performance-witnessing in order to encounter the invited guests.

performance space with little or no “direction” from the production. Staging a la promenade encourages the audience to use their twilight gaze (Levin), noticing what lies in the margins of vision and giving them permission to go there; it subverts the stare induced by proscenium staging. Furthermore, by being active members of the performance space themselves, audience members are also compelled to be more attentive to the actors’ spatializing gestures. It begins largely with the effort to avoid being run into or run over, but as the show proceeds the audience member begins to develop a sensitivity to movement within the space, and begins thinking of the actors, not as objects to look at and “read,” but as bodied subjects with which to interact.

In promenade staging, you can give the audience a job to do other than sitting passively and observing. Think of ways to “cast” or deploy audience members into the action of the play. Don’t make a big deal out of their participation, like a Vegas showgirl singling out an audience member and sitting on his lap while singing a romantic ballad to the poor sod, whose face inevitably grows red with embarrassment as his buddies snicker behind their fists. Cast audience members into the action subtly, without drawing much attention to it: in a garden scene, have an actor give an audience member a watering can and mention in passing that the tomato plants look dry; in a soup kitchen scene, give an audience member an apron and thank him for volunteering to ladle out dinner as you guide him to the tureen; etc. The point is to avoid the situation where the audience member throws up defensive barriers and either retreats in embarrassment or begins “performing”; instead, invite them gently to be involved in the present moment of the narrative, to bring their own knowledge and experience to the narrative line.

2. Encourage participants to occupy new or unfamiliar positions

Just as existing in a new physical space changes one's perspective, performing a different job accomplishes the same task, so encourage drifting. At zAmya, Maren facilitates but she also participates as an actor in improvisations. Corey always acts in zAmya's shows, but in 2009 he also helped organize the workshop material into a script. Big Daddy and Larry, both long-time zAmya actors, trained in facilitation techniques during the summer of 2008, and organized the first co-creative event that year. Teaching participants the skills needed to lead and facilitate CBT events reinforces that community members are not just information fields to be "mined," but should also be engaged in decisions about structuring and ordering the narrative, and other creative decisions.

You can also ask people who don't know anything about theater to be in charge part of the time. Invite scientists, journalists, mothers, health-care workers, novelists, nuns, chefs, and other professionals from your community in to your rehearsals. Don't just interview them (again, don't just mine them for information), but ask them to structure the rehearsal and the narrativizing techniques according to their own discipline. How would a journalist organize a story circle? How would a nun lead a vocal warm-up? How would a scientist write a script? Don't ditch the theater knowledge that professionals bring to the table, but allow it to be revitalized by people who are looking at the craft with new eyes. This will make the performances new, interesting, and locally responsive.

Even if you consider yourself a "professional" theater, employ non-self-identified-performers and work with non-traditional performance texts. This is a way of

asking the audience to occupy a new position – not as consumers of theater, but as critical co-witnesses. The acting that non-self-identified performers produce is not so polished that the audience forgets that characters are constructs and, thus, the performance cannot be consumed as easily. Additionally, as devising practitioner and scholars Govan, Nicholson, and Normington write, “the unfixed qualities of performance invite audiences to recognize the ways in which fiction is contained in reality, and how reality is always implied in fictional or fictionalized narratives” (57). Pair actors with non-actors, personal narrative with imagined fiction, scripted scenarios with moments of improvisation – all these techniques denaturalize the theater event, its space, and its inhabitants, keeping the audience on its toes and leading to their increased mindfulness of the present moment.

3. Construct precise and compelling images

Theater branches out from the oral storytelling tradition because it is also (primarily?) a visual medium – the ancient Greek word *theatron* means a looking-place. Take care with the way images are constructed in rehearsal; have long discussions about them and refine them until they tell the right story/ies. Allow the mantra “this is how it is” to inform your performance images. Allow the “this” to be contradictory, plural, polyvocal; allow the “this” to include autobiography but also imagined utopias. In performance, let the audience linger with these images – let them have a first reaction to them, and then a second, and a third . . . Interrupt their tendency to quickly consume the image as though it were a television ad spot. Include the audience *in* the image – shift the space around (see suggestion #1) to literally include them in the image, or create

radically unfinished images which the audience cannot resist thinking themselves (or better yet, *moving* themselves) into.

One of the most carefully constructed images in zAmya's production history occurred in *Ten You Win/Ten You Lose* while Big Daddy was telling a story about being addicted to drugs, going through rehab multiple times, and then getting clean. As he performed his lengthy monologue (which was to a certain extent always improvised in performance, and therefore different for every show) the other actors painstakingly created a human sculpture behind him. It was a tableau which began at one end with Shaun lying in the street, dead from a drug overdose; the next character took his place beside Shaun, crouching on the ground; the next character knelt looking up; the next tentatively began to stand. At the end of his monologue, Big Daddy took his place at the end of the sculpture, standing fully upright and looking at the audience. His monologue concluded that people in need can survive monumental adversity when they are shown care by members of their community: it is a gentle challenge issued to the members of the audience. The image itself contains multiple meanings. It shows a kind of progression from addiction to sobriety, indicating that addiction cannot just be immediately fixed, but that it requires many difficult steps. Seeing Shaun's dead body and Big Daddy's upright figure simultaneously also suggested that addiction is never entirely forgotten, that relapse (or worse) is always possible. And Big Daddy's direct gaze at the audience as he issues his gentle challenge implicates the audience into the narrative of recovery, but also perhaps into the narrative of addiction itself as it unites images of homelessness, poverty, and drug use/addiction in the same gesture – his gaze seemed to be asking: where do you see *yourself* in this picture?

4. Appoint a dramaturg to facilitate the talkback

Employ a dramaturg who is actively involved in creating the conditions for intimacy, and whose job it is to plan the talkback as carefully as the performance is planned. Create a ritual to induct the audience into the event, a ritual which explains or performs the goals and expectations for intimacy without grasping. zAmya usually ends their shows with a question or provocation to the audience, and has in the past asked audience members to confer with someone sitting by them whom they don't know. These pairs are then invited to share their conversations with the whole group if they want to. It is a pedagogical task designed to encourage participation and discussion from people who might not be comfortable speaking in front of a large group.

However, I believe the entire talkback can be structured with more precision than zAmya currently employs. If you are trying to produce an intimacy of social change, empower the dramaturg to explain the specific goals of the talkback, and to call the audience out when they engage in grasping or clinging behavior or language. When they ask (as the privileged audience members often do at zAmya): what can we do to help? . . . turn the question back on them: what kinds of behaviors do you engage in that are subtly or explicitly oppressive? Don't give them a list of instructions for helping; instead, invite them to engage in an act of mindfulness, to be aware of their own attachment to desires. "Helping" the underprivileged is usually aimed at (and often succeeds in) making the privileged feel better. Maybe they shouldn't feel better just yet. Tell them that. Don't punish them, but do invite them to linger with their own discomfort rather than trying to eradicate it.

This suggestion arose in response to the vignette I related about Arminta and the audience member who wanted to know more about Arminta's past. If an "intimacy dramaturg" had been present, perhaps she or he could have invited both women to reflect on their affective responses in the moment, to the way their hearts felt – was there grasping, clinging, intense desire, or aversion present? If so, what kinds of ideas or actions was that grasping or aversion attached to? This line of inquiry might lead to discoveries (and I am speculating here because this didn't actually happen): the audience member might have made a discovery about her own white privilege, or she could have linked the way she was demanding information from Arminta to the difference in the colors of their skin, or she could have suddenly remembered a time she saw her own mother make these same demands on another person of color in her childhood, an act which naturalized this kind of behavior. Facilitating these kinds of moments of awareness in the talkback can be the job of a dramaturg in this kind of theater. Again, the point of an intimate social-change theater is not to relay more statistical information, but to bring awareness to the way we see each other, and thus to transform the social encounter.

5. Stage things that people are afraid or ill-equipped to talk about

The ultimate aim of a meditation practice is to just sit, to just follow the breath, without judgment, without attachment, but with full awareness. Make the theater into a meditation on ideologies, especially the most oppressive and/or subtle ones. Do this by performing behaviors and images shaped by ideologies – i.e. performing sexism, racism, classism, consumerism – and invite the audience to enter into their pain and violence, rather than casting a judgment on them. This is what I was suggesting when I

disagreed with “un-casting” Larry as the Bad Witch in chapter two. Allowing the audience to cast judgment on, say, racism, permits them to distance themselves from it, and thereby absolve themselves of any implication in its practices: it allows them to narrativize a world in which they do not perpetuate racism and therefore have no obligation to subvert it. As Brecht said, engender the “attitude of somebody wondering” (Willett 96). Actively compel audience members to reflect upon the ways they are implicated in perpetuating social injustice. Do not castigate them, and do not turn the theater event into a propaganda machine; simply invite them to “just watch” their own behavior, their own desires and aversions. This will build the foundation for productive dialogue. As Nunberg says, only after we make the discovery, “*This* is how it is,” can we proceed to the question, “Can this be ok?”

6. Enact alternative pedagogies

This harkens back to the first suggestion, shaking up the architecture. But this time, shake up the means by which a social architecture is created, especially the conduits through which knowledge is created. I would like to extrapolate at length in this last suggestion, because enacting an alternative pedagogy is at the heart of creating an intimacy of social change in the theater.

Do like Freire does: avoid the banking model of theatrical pedagogy. Do not take the audience for empty vessels who need only to be filled with the activist message of social change. Instead, allow the theatrical event to become a ping-pong table, a dialogic and active event where the audience and the actors are collaboratively involved in making the art work hum. Make the audience into creators of art rather than its passive consumers – do this throughout the performance and not just as an afterthought.

Invite the audience in to the space of creation (and hence, knowledge production) rather than remaining on its fringes. Civically-engaged theater director Michael Rohd does this by inviting the audience to do activities with each other, such as the mock urban planning games he gave audience members to play in *Built*. Techniques like these update Boal's notion of the spect-actor, and avoid the pedagogical gesture which keeps some participants at the margins and some at the center of the creative event. The problem with the margin-center schema is that it divests the marginalized of any implication in or power over the event. We are used to hearing about the problems of this schema when it thrusts the dispossessed to the margin and robs them of agency. But what happens when the privileged drift to the margin of the pedagogical event? Doris Santoro Gómez theorizes this by recourse to the notion of a marginalized "woman's place" at the periphery of a classroom when that classroom is focused solely on students:

For some teachers, a preoccupation with an excess of pedagogical power suggests that they are, in fact, exhorted to avoid exerting any influence in the classroom. The result is a pedagogy of disappearance that dismisses teachers' expertise and necessary roles in the classrooms as creators of educational experience. (316)

Instead of the margin-center schema, Gómez offers another spatial metaphor that avoids reducing the teacher to a ghostly presence in the classroom performing invisible labor (326): she follows Elizabeth Grosz in inviting the feminist educator to dwell in the space of "the in-between," in a space where there is "no proper place" (330, 331). Gómez quotes Grosz: ". . . the in-between is the only space of *movement*, of development or becoming . . ." and Gómez extrapolates that, "Being 'unmoved' connotes the failure of a relation. Relations are not static conditions, but are suffused

with potential” (331). Gómez also quotes Gert Biesta, who calls this space of communication: “the gap” (331).

What a beautiful description of intimacy! A space of movement and becoming between bodies, a place that refuses to adhere to the “shoulds,” a space of utter possibility. Mainstream professional theater often enacts what Gómez refers to as a pedagogy of disappearance – literally! – when the audience sits meekly in the dark waiting to give their standing ovation at the end. What if, instead, theater invited audiences into “the gap”? What if it gave them permission and responsibility for being a part of the narrative action, rather than passively consuming the art object they just purchased for the price of a ticket? One more story to elaborate my point . . .

In a 2001 article, Jill Dolan mentions that an acting teacher in her program has a sticker on his door that reads, “Don’t Think, Act,” which Dolan says violates her beliefs as a theater educator (“Rehearsing” 1). But is it possible that the slogan on Dolan’s colleague’s door has to do, not with anti-intellectualism, but with mindfulness practice? I say this too in my acting classes, in the middle of improvisation exercises, “Don’t think! Go for it!” After reading Dolan’s article, I began issuing a caveat to my students. I would explain, “Don’t think” means “Stop planning!” or “Be more aware!” or even “Think more quickly!” “Don’t think” is a punctum designed to alert the actors to the fact that they are not paying attention to or responding to the immediate environment, that they are lost in a daydream about what they imagine the moment should be like, or that they have retreated into their fear of looking silly. “Not thinking” involves entering into an intimate relationship with extremely local time and space, and being available to whatever possibilities exist there. “Don’t think” is not a critique of intellectualism, it is

a critique of alienation, of the effects of alienated labor or other mechanizations upon our body-minds. The goal of the improvisation is to discover one's own ability to be spontaneous in the present moment, rather than constantly self-censoring. "Don't think" means to enter what directing teachers Kirk and Bellas call the space between (*The Art of Directing*), or what, in Gómez's article, Grosz called the in-between or what Biesta called the gap. The existence in the gap cannot be planned for – excessive planning prevents actors from being wholly open to their acting partners, from being able to say "yes" to whatever that partner initiates, from being able to discover, "ah, *this* is how it is!" and responding to actual circumstances rather than ones that have been pre-formed in the imagination. Avoiding the gap, or operating within previously held beliefs, is safe – it doesn't allow for any kind of transformation, and it prevents actors (of all kinds – this applies to the people standing on the stage as much as it does to those sitting off the stage) from encountering the world.

Stepping in to the gap, moving in the space between, allows for possibilities. As Gómez said, "Relation involves movement." To hearken back to my chapters three and four, this also resonates with what Agnes Heller is implying when she says, "To feel is to be involved in something," or what Ross Chambers refers to as the transactional nature of narrative. In the gap, we move beyond ourselves; in the gap, a transformation is effected. As Simon O'Sullivan says in his discussion of the Buddhist ritual known as the puja, "to remain within one's own boundaries" is to entirely miss the point of art ("Writing" 119).

To enter the gap and practice mindfulness there, to surrender to the present moment – this is an intimacy of social change. To be mindful is not to "stop thinking"

as Jill Dolan fears, but to be fully in the mind, to be fully engaged in a moment of experience with awareness. To mind is also to take care of, to have compassion, to practice Levin's welcoming gaze. Both meanings are contained within the practice of mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness practice in this sense becomes a pedagogical tool not only of good theater but also of good citizenship, as it generates awareness of and responsibility for body, space, and community.

Does letting-be, or mindfulness practice, constitute a pedagogy of disappearance? It does only if we consider our being or our visibility to be tied up in our ability to have control, to grasp. Levin explains:

Not to will is precisely the attitude of *Gelassenheit* [letting-be], achieved – if you like, paradoxically – only by the greatest of ongoing exertions, practices of the Self involving the gaze in the neutralization of its inveterate tendency to grasp, secure, master, and dominate . . . (236)

Considered this way, letting-be is quite the opposite of disappearance; it is radical, active *presence* that occurs as the result of constant awareness. Letting-be, as the practice of existing in a compassionate attitude towards others and the earth, also compels the self to be present in the act of giving reception. By practicing letting-be, Levin might suggest, by practicing intimacy without grasping, by showing up to the social encounter without desire, perhaps the opportunity exists to enact a more humanized, dimensional existence. This is the goal I wish to see accomplished in civically-engaged theater.

These six suggestions for achieving an intimacy of social change are only the beginning of a list and, I hope, the beginning of a dialogue. I trust that anyone who

reads this and who is interested in civically-engaged theater can add techniques. My goal has been to continue the conversation (begun by performance scholars like Gablik, Jackson, Graver and Kruger) about ways that community-based theater can move away from the task of representing community and toward the task of creating it, specifically, a community collectively engaged in the act of letting-be, in the awakening to the present moment of lived experience. It is in this moment of purposeful awareness, conditioned by non-attachment, which a revitalized kind of social intercourse can occur in our theaters and elsewhere. I believe it is with good reason that Buddhism has taken such a hold on Western spiritual practice, and this belief is based on an observation I make from my own weary heart and which I also see reflected all around me: I am tired of being on the market, I am exhausted by the never-ending cycle of consumerism, of what Ajahn Sumedho calls the “suffering of attachment” (22). Sumedho, in his commentary on the four noble truths, says wryly, “America encourages you to try to be as happy as you can by getting things” (38). A theater founded upon an intimacy of social change resists this version of happiness; it seeks instead to nourish radical presencing and create nodes of intimate encounter between human beings, just for the moment.

Afterword

I come to the theater with the expectation that it will change my life – I hope for the most profound encounters, the most radical yet delicate revolutions. Sometimes they happen. Before I leave you I have to tell you this story. I went to see Sophocles' *Antigone* at the Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis in October 2006. This was my experience:

As I walk into the theatre, I encounter an open space: there is a round dais in the middle, piles of rubble occupy some corners, and a balcony has been constructed at the far end. Actors mill about the space, which is littered in newspapers, and I am told by ushers that I can sit or stand wherever I like; there is no designated audience seating. There is some music, an actor plays a ball game with some spectators, there is some dancing. Actors and audience tentatively occupy the same space.

Towards the end of the performance, the actress playing Antigone is on her way to enter a cave where she will ultimately die, trapped in a living coffin. She pleads with the audience, "Will no one be my friend?" And then, it happens . . . a young man from the audience, a tall child really, strides across the space and embraces Antigone. She clutches him, shocked, I think. He takes a step back, and gazes into her eyes; he touches her shoulder, and then retreats back into the crowd of spectators. The actress can barely speak her next lines, her voice is filled with the emotion of this encounter. My own tears overflow. This production, this promenade staging, has created a space for interaction, a raw and spontaneous encounter, between actor and witness. This production has reminded us that we have bodies, that we live in a community, and that

we have the capacity for action and generosity. And this child had the courage to reply to this clarion call, this invitation that the production issued.

I would love to think of art as something that can work like a virus, moving surreptitiously through dominant space and reorganizing it, so that ultimately, ideally, the system would crumble from within, incapacitated because its inner workings had been contaminated. But I don't really think that is possible. I don't think capitalism will be eroded by well-meaning artists. But I also don't think that is reason enough to quit trying. What art does is provide the hope (and sometimes the proof) that small resistances are possible, that we can escape the cycle of accumulation and production for a few minutes or hours, and that in that short time, those of us who participate can clean away some of the deafening white noise created by a lifetime of survival tactics, that we can listen clearly for a moment, without desire or aversion. That we can see each other, not as accomplices in a money-making scheme, not as opponents in a market war, but as humans: faulty, frivolous, in pain, hungry, unsure, and worthy of *being with* in all this complexity. Worthy of compassion. Worthy of being welcomed with a generous act, an embrace, a sustained exchange of eye contact.

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