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**Our Voice is Powerful:
Toward an Aesthetics of Healing in the Performing Justice Project**

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by

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2020

Dedication

For Confidence, AsSu, AV, North Baby, Timya, Cookie, Ciana, Adrianna, and Star.

You are changing the world.

Periodt.

Acknowledgements

This thesis project and document is the result of the encouragement, patience, mentorship, inspiration, care, and grace that has been offered to me by many brilliant artists, teachers, activists, friends, and family. These acknowledgements provide only a glimpse at my infinite and immeasurable gratitude for the community of people who have shaped and guided my life.

I offer my deepest gratitude to: Katie, who models how to lead and learn with equal parts humanity, care, and rigor and whose belief in me makes me feel bolder and braver. Megan, who taught me that love belongs in teaching (and feedback) and who reminds me that it is important to use our gifts, even when it feels hard. Selena, for saying yes to two strangers (turned friends) and sharing your joyful energy, critical perspective, and committed artistry in every part of this process. Lynn and Megan, for creating the Performing Justice Project and inviting me to join the remarkable legacy of PJP teaching artists. Jada, Siri, Michael, and Becca Drew, who all inspire me to be more honest and creative and whose incredible artistry elevated this process in ways that would not have been possible without them. Faith, my work-wife and fellow Paris lady whose collaborative partnership over the past three years has been one of the greatest blessings of my career and whose friendship is a gift in my life—I will forever be grateful for that joke you made in the back of a van on the bumpy road back from Tuzla. And the young people and staff at Resident Place, for sharing your creativity, bravery, and enthusiasm and reminding me just how powerful our voices can be.

I further wish to thank: Amissa, who taught me nothing is worth sacrificing your own (or others') humanity. Lara, who always encourages my (sometimes time-consuming) ideas in service of devising new ways of teaching and learning. Jenn, Shavonne, Roxanne,

and DTYC faculty, who exhibit professionalism by practicing collaboration, empathy, and playful innovation. Michelle Habeck, Dr. Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez, Dr. Lisa Thompson, and Dr. Molly Wiebe for inviting me to ask questions I had never considered and imagine the possibilities of cross disciplinary collaboration and exchange.

To the DTYC graduate student colleagues who became my family, I owe so much of this project and paper to your loving kindness and genius inspiration. To the Grackles, Faith and Will, with every project that I take on in the future I will be chasing the belonging, purpose, inspiration, and love that I feel when I collaborate with you. I love you both, deep in my soul. To Kate, Ally, and Beth, I am honored to forge the pathways of change alongside you, incomparable artist-educator-scholars that you are. And Lina, whose friendship emerged when I needed it most and who never lets me forget that I am an artist—my greatest accomplishment in this program is the trust, care, and knowing I have cultivated with you. Now let's make some art.

And finally, I acknowledge my family, who fuel my passion and inspire my play. Lizzy, for every bowl of oatmeal, *Harry Potter* marathon, and misadventure we have shared over the past three years. Your unconditional support and care have buoyed me in the hardest of times—I look forward to repaying the favor in Baltimore. To my Sweaters and best friends, Janet and Alison, my strongest critics and fiercest advocates. I am always trying to be more like you both. Dad, the best professor I have ever known, who taught me how to embody bold and unapologetic passion for things I care about. And most especially to Mom, the person whose example as a dedicated community artist has inspired my work and life in the most profound ways. Thank you for answering every call and reading every draft. I love you.

Abstract

Our Voice is Powerful: Toward an Aesthetics of Healing in the Performing Justice Project

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2020

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Over the past decade, youth workers across disciplines have adopted “trauma-informed care” approaches to working, learning, and creating with young people. Though trauma-informed care practices seek to attend to the needs of young people who have and continue to experience trauma, such practices also tend to embrace a limited definition of trauma that focuses on preventing symptoms rather than addressing root causes and promoting well-being. This MFA thesis examines a semester-long performance-building process that explored racial and gender justice with youth at a residency for young people living within the foster care system in central Texas. Using a reflective practitioner research method, the author identifies and considers moments of youth and adult healing centered engagement within a shared youth-centered devising process. Through qualitative research methods of thematic coding and analysis, the author discusses the relationship between healing and aesthetics and advocates for an “aesthetics of healing” in applied drama and theatre with youth that centers commitment, openness, and disruption.

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Chapter One

If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

—Aboriginal activist group, Queensland, 1970s¹

I will never forget the sense of belonging that I felt the first time I was knowingly in a room full of people who called themselves teaching artists. I had been living in New York City for about two and a half years at the time, constantly hustling for both acting jobs and financial income. Frustrated by a lack of personal purpose in the artistic and monetary opportunities I encountered, I found myself enrolling in the Teaching Artist Training and Internship Program (TATIP) through Community Word Project, an arts education organization dedicated to providing young people throughout the city with collaborative arts residencies. I had only heard about the mysterious job title “teaching artist” a few months prior, but as soon as the workshop started, I knew I was home. Our class of interns were as diverse in artistic medium as we were in personal identity. Yet we all shared a similar desire to uncover and reflect on our own practices, experiences, and beliefs in order to use our artistry to support others on their aesthetic journeys. Unlike cold audition rooms where I often felt like I had to change myself in order to prove my worth as an artist, TATIP invited me to claim my (teaching) artist identity for myself, highlighting the inextricable link between my strengths as a person and as an artist. While my pursuit of a “successful” acting career often felt isolating and lonely, TATIP placed connection across difference and sameness at the center of artistic development and achievement. I remember immediately calling my mom after that first workshop and saying “This is the first time since I moved to New York that I know I’m in the right place. I feel it in my

¹ This quote is often attributed to Aboriginal activist Lila Watson. However, Watson has stated that she does not feel “comfortable being credited for something that had been born of a collective process” (Northland).

body.” Though I am not sure I realized it at the time, I recognize now that the knowing I felt in my body marked the beginning of my healing journey toward a deeper understanding of my own identity, agency, and power in the world.

TATIP and the teaching artist community I was a part of in New York not only encouraged me to embrace my identity as a teaching artist, but also challenged me to reflect on my relationship to systemic privilege. As a white, able-bodied, neurotypical, cisgender woman from a middle-class household in the Midwest, I understood privilege and oppression on theoretical levels but frankly had not considered how systems of power had often benefitted me over time. Through TATIP and other professional learning opportunities, I participated in a number of arts-based workshops focused on exposing oppressive systems, confronting (unconscious) bias, and shifting unjust practices. I was continuously inspired by the ways that these workshops honored individual experience, cultivated collective visioning, modeled accountability to impact, and positioned artmaking as an inherent element of change-making. It was through these workshops that I first began to understand and interrogate my own relationship to whiteness, colonialism, heteronormativity, classism, and other dominant systems. This gradual and life-long artistic reflection on both the injustice and possibility in the world has guided me toward my current purpose as a teaching artist and person, which is to use collaborative performance to expose injustice and devise liberatory ways of being that reverberate out to create change in the world. I further seek to continuously unearth the layers of my privilege in order to disrupt my own internalized assumptions and behaviors that replicate harmful practices and ideas.

When I first came to graduate school, I was very focused on what I called “real change,” by which I meant change connected to government policies and practices. Enamored by Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy and Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the

Oppressed and Legislative Theatre practices, I viewed progress solely as tangible action within social and civic spaces. During my time at UT, my worldview has shifted, however, as I have come to follow the paths toward change forged and fostered by feminist and queer artists, scholars, and pedagogues like Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Nandita Dinesh, adrienne maree brown, Toni Cade Bambara, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, and Ntozake Shange. These and other radical thinkers and doers encourage me to ground my work in an explicitly decolonized and anti-racist pursuit of collective liberation and joyful revolution. Through a never-ending process of unlearning positivist assertions and Eurocentric value systems, I have come to recognize how **my own liberation is bound up with others'**, as the Queensland activist group I quote at the beginning of this chapter eloquently advocates. My interest in “real change” has further evolved to encompass how personal change impacts systems, or as activist Grace Lee Boggs urges, how to “transform yourself to transform the world” (qtd. in brown 53). From this transformative lens, I move toward and through my MFA research project excited to further explore the intimate side of creative change-making from both a participant and personal perspective. In this reflective practitioner research study, I ask these key questions: *What is the experience of the ensemble within a justice-focused applied drama/theatre project and partnership? How does the design, rehearsal, and performance of a youth-centered devising process create opportunities for healing? What is the relationship between aesthetics and healing within a performance-building process with youth?*

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In the summer and fall of 2019, I collaborated with my creative partner and fellow MFA candidate, Faith Hillis, to design, facilitate, and produce a Performing Justice Project (PJP), a youth-centered applied drama/theatre program developed at the University of

Texas at Austin that focuses on issues of racial and gender (in)justice. Faith and I partnered with Resident Place², a residency for teenagers and young adults living within foster care in Texas. After a three-week intensive pilot in July 2019, we designed and facilitated seventeen one and a half to three-hour rehearsals with fourteen youth participants (ages 13-17) from Resident Place between September 20, 2019 and November 26, 2019. Participant attendance at rehearsals varied, ranging from one participant who attended only one rehearsal to another who attended fifteen rehearsals. After the first six rehearsals, the number of participants present at each rehearsal steadily grew from five to eight, culminating with eight participants in the final performance sharing.

Throughout the fall project, the youth ensemble created personal stories, poems, gestures, and other performance material that they shared and combined with one another as they worked toward a public performance. Using a qualitative research approach, or what researcher Johnny Saldaña calls “the study of natural social life” (4), I collected a range of data: ensemble-generated aesthetic artifacts from rehearsals, video and audio recordings of in-process performance pieces created by youth artists, video recording and still images of the culminating sharing, and my own reflective practitioner audio log.

Though Resident Place is a non-profit organization, young people are referred to the residency by Child Protective Services (CPS), of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. As such, Resident Place provides services for adolescents and young adults between the ages of 11-21 who CPS (i.e. the state) identifies as female, but who may actually hold any number of diverse gender identities and expressions. According to their annual report, in 2017 the racial demographics of youth served by Resident Place were as follows: 41% Hispanic/Latino, 40% Caucasian, 15% African American, and 4% Other/Not

² The names of the residency and participants are pseudonyms. Names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Reported (*2018 Annual*). As stated on their website, Resident Place serves “individuals who have experienced severe emotional trauma, abuse and neglect” through a Residential Treatment Center (RTC) model that provides residents “a highly structured environment with 24-hour therapeutic support.” Performing Justice Project was a part of the recreation programming at Resident Place, which meant participants joined PJP through a combination of therapist recommendation, individual availability within schedules created by care team, and personal interest in the project. Recognizing that race and gender identity can be complex and fluid, the racial and gender breakdown of the youth participants at the time of the project were: eight (White), five (Latinx), two (Black), one (Native); twelve (female-identifying) and two (male-identifying).

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

In this section, I situate this practice-based research project at the intersection of youth studies and applied drama and theatre practices. First, I discuss and (re)define trauma in order to further contextualize the existence and impact of trauma amongst youth at Resident Place, as well as the need for healing centered approaches to responding to youth trauma. I then examine how social constructions of children and youth often prioritize protectionism over youth agency which can lead to a lack of youth autonomy within institutions and systems. Next, I critique “trauma informed care” approaches to youth work and offer “healing centered engagement” as an asset-based alternative. I go on to position this study within a growing canon of applied drama/theatre (ADT) scholarship and discuss the significance of aesthetics in ADT practice. Finally, I describe how PJP uses devising to support individual and collective moves toward justice.

(Re)defining Trauma

When working with and in social services and programs that address trauma, like Resident Place, I recognize the need to interrogate dominant definitions of and personal assumptions about trauma. I wonder how deconstructing and reconstructing understandings of trauma might lay a path toward justice that centers healing. In *Decolonizing Trauma Work*, Indigenous health care practitioner and scholar Renee Linklater identifies the origins of the term “trauma” in Western medicine and psychiatric terminology (22). Embracing an Indigenous worldview, Linklater refutes the capacity of Western trauma language to adequately address the lasting violence and pain of colonization. Linklater asserts that “Using trauma terminology implies that the individual is responsible for the response, rather than the broader systematic force caused by the state’s abuse of power” (Linklater 22). In this way, Linklater emphasizes how medical definitions and diagnosis of trauma operate to shield Western governments and communities from recognizing and being held accountable for the ongoing impact and practice of colonization. Linklater further challenges the notion that trauma describes a temporary reaction to a singular event or injury. Because of the ongoing and repeated harm caused by colonialism, for many Indigenous people “living in and with trauma is a common experience” (Linklater 23). Trauma is not momentary, Linklater insists, rather it is a “cumulative, emotional and psychological wounding” that evolves over time and is passed down between generations (23). Thus, Linklater’s decolonizing approach to understanding and responding to trauma acknowledges the iterative and compounded nature of trauma, especially within historically marginalized individuals and communities.

Employing a similarly decolonized worldview as Linklater, trauma specialist and therapist Resmaa Menakem examines the relationship between trauma and what he calls “white-body supremacy” in the United States in the book *My Grandmother’s Hands*:

Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies. Menakem defines trauma as “the body’s protective response to an event—or series of events—that it perceives as potentially dangerous” (7). Menakem emphasizes that trauma is not a weakness, but a tool our bodies use for safety and survival (7). Like Linklater, Menakem asserts that trauma can live in our bodies long after inciting events; over time, reflexive trauma responses can begin to seem like aspects of a person’s personality, be passed down through generations, and even start to look like culture (9). Such is the case with trauma caused by white-body supremacy. Through unsafe and unjust systems, institutions, and norms; human genetics; and abusive family practices, trauma from white-body supremacy continues to exist in all bodies in the United States (Menakem 10). Menakem insists “no matter what we look like, if we were born and raised in America, white-body supremacy and our adaptations to it are in our blood. Our very bodies house the unhealed dissonance and trauma of our ancestors” (10). With this, Menakem outlines how systemic violence and oppression causes individual and collective trauma for both marginalized and privileged people.

Trauma theorists like Linklater and Menakem emphasize the ways in which dominant systems like white supremacy, colonization, and patriarchy cause and perpetuate trauma in individuals and communities. In this way, I understand trauma not as a singular event, but as an ongoing and repeated experience born out of unjust environments and harmful practices. Racialized and gendered trauma exists in all people (even those who benefit from oppressive systems) and is reiterated by social institutions and interactions. This is not to argue that all people carry the same trauma nor that all trauma is the direct cause of socio-political systems. For example, the trauma that I hold as a person who benefits from white supremacy, is certainly different from the racialized trauma experienced by people of color. At Resident Place, while the young people carry their own

racialized and gendered trauma, they also “come from backgrounds of secrets, sexual abuse, and grooming³ behaviors from others,” as described in the organization’s volunteer handbook (“Boundaries” 44). In other words, youth come to Resident Place as a result of significant and specific trauma experiences and/or events in their lives. During our volunteer training, Faith and I learned that because trauma is such a part of the culture of Resident Place, staff and volunteers are supposed to “discourage trauma-bonding” by not allowing young people to share trauma with each other (Meeting Notes, 9 September 2019). Instead, youth are meant to focus on their “personal therapeutic goals” (Meeting Notes, 9 September 2019). Though I acknowledge and respect Resident Place’s individual, therapeutic approach to trauma from a clinical standpoint, I also recognize the potential for exchange and collaboration to support collective healing within unjust systems and structures.

Social Construction of Children and Youth

Just as Performing Justice Project invites youth to interrogate the social construction of race and gender, leading youth workers and scholars remind us that childhood itself is socially and politically constructed and maintained through systems of power and control. Theatre artist and scholar Stephani Etheridge Woodson characterizes children and youth not only as “an anthropological organizing structure,” but as “a cultural space” that is created and recreated by dominant “adult narratives, desires, and dreams” (23). Etheridge Woodson observes that like race and gender, hegemonic discourses inform how communities and individuals construct childhood identities and experiences. With this understanding, Etheridge Woodson encourages teaching artists, social workers, and other

³ Grooming refers to the process of an offender luring a potential victim into an abusive sexual relationship maintained through secrecy (“Preventing”).

youth workers to acknowledge that personal and shared contextual concepts of childhood restrict our own perceptions of “what and who young people are and/or should be” (24).

In the same ways that white supremacy and patriarchy in the United States function systemically and systematically to oppress people of color, womxn, non-binary people, and other non-dominant identities, cultural models of childhood inherently bestow adults with power over young people. Etheridge Woodson asserts that in the US, “Legally, children and youth exist under a protectionist doctrine that functionally denies them some of the basic human rights guaranteed to adults” (25). In other words, adult voters and legislators devise, approve, and enact policies that are meant to protect young people, but which actually work to limit youth rights. Etheridge Woodson goes on to suggest that common restrictions like youth curfews inhibit young people’s access to and actions within public space. I further observe that youth who live in the care of the state (e.g. foster care, juvenile legal system, etc), face increased regulation of both their public and private behavior and expression, as well as of their bodies. At Resident Place, for instance, the volunteer handbook outlines that because many residents “struggle in social situations,” caregivers at Resident Place are there to “create a healthy and safe environment” in order to “provide guidance for the residents when navigating social interactions” (“Boundaries” 44). The handbook includes a number of guidelines meant to “teach and model positive interactions,” such as:

Conversations among residents ALWAYS need to be supervised.

All physical interactions between residents need to be with staff permission and supervision (hugging, styling hair, etc.)

Residents are NEVER allowed to lend and borrow personal items with or from other residents.

Residents should not engage in behaviors such as horseplay with other residents. Horseplay is defined as rough or boisterous play or pranks.

(“Boundaries” 44-45)

While I see how these rules seek to prioritize resident safety through staff oversight and intervention, I also recognize how these Place policies limit youth agency and autonomy. In addition to these and other rules, the physical space at Resident Place is also extremely controlled. The campus is fully enclosed by a gate that is locked at all times. Every time Faith and I arrived and or needed to leave campus, we had to call the site coordinator to be let in and out of the gate. The main buildings on campus, such as the activity room where we held PJP rehearsals, are locked at all times and residents have to walk with a staff member from the cottages where they live to all activities. Residents are allowed to leave campus, but all off-site trips and guest visits must be approved and arranged by the young person’s care team. As a guest in the Resident Place space, I acknowledge that the many restrictions on individual autonomy exist, at least in part, because of the various trauma that residents have and continue to experience. With PJP, however, I was eager to explore how focusing on healing, rather than trauma, in my approach to working with young people at Resident Place might support youth agency without sacrificing safety.

Healing Centered Engagement

In recent years, youth workers across disciplines have developed and adopted “trauma informed” theories and ways of working that seek to recognize and attend to the needs of young people who have and continue to experience trauma. With this study, I join scholars and practitioners who critique the challenges and limitations of youth engagement methods that center trauma and choose instead to focus my pedagogical and aesthetic approach to applied drama/theatre on healing. Educator and leading theorist on healing centered practices Shawn Ginwright observes that “incomplete” trauma informed care (1)

does not recognize that trauma is experienced collectively, (2) neglects to address the root causes and environmental contexts of trauma, and (3) focuses on treating trauma symptoms rather than fostering well-being (“The Future”). Like Linklater and Menakem, Ginwright understands trauma as an ongoing, shared experience that is shaped by systemic forces on internal, interpersonal, and institutional levels. In contrast to trauma informed care, Ginwright proposes that

A healing centered approach to addressing trauma requires a different question that moves beyond “what happened to you” to “what’s right with you” and views those exposed to trauma as agents in the creation of their own well-being rather than victims of traumatic events. (“The Future”)

In other words, healing centered engagement focuses on assets and possibility by positioning youth as integral actors in shifting the harmful conditions that cause trauma. As an applied drama/theatre practice, PJP builds on youth artists’ strengths to imagine and enact “gender and racial justice in their own lives and communities,” as stated on the PJP website (*Performing*). My intention with this project-based research was to explore individual and collective healing through embodied performance-building, because I wanted to find out what an “aesthetics of healing” might look like in the Performing Justice Project, in order to understand how applied drama/theatre processes with youth can (re)imagine development of aesthetic rigor as a healing practice.

Applied Drama and Theatre

As a field, applied drama and theatre (ADT) exists within intersections and thus much debate exists about how (or whether) to define and categorize the practice(s). Throughout time and place, ADT has been referred to as community-based theatre, community engaged theatre, theatre for change, and innumerable other terms. Drawing on the scholarship of Helen Nicolson, James Thompson, Tim Prentki, Sheila Preston, and

others, I understand ADT as a broad range of theatre and drama practices that occur in non-traditional theatre settings and focus on community and social change. According to British ADT scholar Helen Nicholson, ADT is often situated in either educational or community contexts and is “primarily concerned with developing new possibilities for everyday living rather than separating theatre-going from other aspects of life” (4). With this, Nicholson rejects the notion that theatre should be an escape from real life, and instead positions ADT as integral to personal and social progress. US-based applied theatre artist Will Weigler further emphasizes how ADT engages community identity and culture, suggesting that:

Applied theatre is grounded in the belief that there is inherent value in people collaboratively creating art about their lives as this work leads to greater understanding of their people’s roots, rights, and historic cultural contributions. Strengthening one’s cultural self-understanding leads in turn, either directly or indirectly, to greater agency: an increased capacity to assert one’s right and express one’s perspectives. (8)

In other words, ADT stems from an understanding of the possibilities that creative expression and collaboration have to support culturally grounded self-actualization that inspires ongoing action and intention.

With the continued formalization and professionalization of ADT, discussion and disagreement persists within the field in regard to language and labels, project intentions, practitioner ethics, participant engagement, aesthetic rigor, and impact assessment. As British scholar and educator James Thompson observes, although ADT “belongs to the communities in which it is practised, it cannot escape the fact that it has strong roots inside university and educational establishments” (17). In the same way that ADT projects are uniquely shaped by the communities and contexts in which they occur, ADT processes are also influenced by the practitioner-researcher(s) positionality, training, interests, goals, and institutional affiliation. While Thompson and others urge that ADT is a “practice by, with, and for the excluded and marginalised” (15), existing ADT literature primarily centers the

theories and experiences of white practitioners from rich countries and institutions. Much of ADT scholarship noticeably lacks the voices and story authorship of historically excluded and marginalized communities with whom ADT artists often work, including: young people, people of color, indigenous people, people who identify as LGBTQIA, undocumented people, refugees, people with disabilities, people experiencing houselessness and displacement, and people who are incarcerated. Although I seek to embody a liberatory, feminist, anti-racist and decolonized worldview as an ADT artist-scholar, I recognize that because of my positionality as a white researcher from the United States, this practice-based research study contributes, in some part, to the dominance of whiteness and Western perspectives within the wider ADT canon.

Aesthetics in Applied Drama and Theatre

In the same way that an artist-scholar's identity and positionality inform their research and discussion of ADT, prominent ideas and assumptions about aesthetics also shape ADT processes and products. For this reason, debates about aesthetic significance and quality of ADT is prominent throughout the field. In the introduction to *Applied Theatre: Aesthetics*, Gareth White entertains the argument that *applied* theatre is not of the same aesthetic as *real* theatre (1). White observes, "*Applied* is different to *pure* theatre, we might easily suppose, which happens in its proper places, and is properly focused on its excellence as a work of art rather on its intention to give benefit" (1). As White points out, this distinction between pure or real theatre and applied theatre assumes that artistic excellence is not the primary goal of applied theatre, nor that socio-political impact the intent of real theatre (1). This misleading perspective further implies that in all forms of theatre, aesthetic excellence and socio-political benefit are separate, competing goals rather than interconnected, complementary intentions. Underlying this thesis project is the belief

that in applied drama/theatre aesthetics play a key role in creating socio-political change by promoting imagination, innovation, and collaboration within critical consciousness and awareness raising. In other words, change-making in ADT does not simply occur *alongside* artistic development, rather change is a *direct result* of quality aesthetic engagement.

When discussing the aesthetic value of ADT, it is also necessary to interrogate how traditional measures of aesthetic quality are shaped by white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, and other dominant systems. To this end, the Americans for the Arts framework “Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change” reclaims aesthetics as “essential” for justice oriented art-making (Borstel 5) while recognizing how “the terms ‘aesthetics’ and ‘aesthetic excellence’ are often used to privilege white Eurocentric standards of beauty, while dismissing or ignoring standards relevant to different artistic and cultural practice” (Borstel 6). The framework outlines eleven distinct aesthetic attributes of arts for change that embrace multiplicity and “expand the common view of aesthetics” (Borstel 6). In this way, the aesthetic attributes emphasize that “artistic quality matters,” in arts for change work like applied drama/theatre, even though “diverse perspectives make the assessment of excellence more challenging” (Borstel 6). With this research study I used the “Aesthetic Perspectives” framework as a lens through which to study the relationship between healing and aesthetics in justice-based ADT.

Devising as Applied Drama and Theatre

This project employed the Performing Justice Project devising model as an applied drama/theatre approach to engaging young people in the ongoing practice of exposing injustice and enacting justice in their own lives and communities. On a fundamental level, community development and education scholar Mia Perry defines devised theatre as “the creation of original work” by an ensemble of artists, which might involve “deconstruction”

of existing texts as well as exploration of visual art, technology, music, and/or dance (65). As an aesthetic form, then, devised theatre disrupts rigid ensemble roles and power dynamics, and instead positions collaboration and relationships at the heart of the creative process. Devised theatre expands prominent ideas of what is considered “theatrical” by engaging multiple perspectives, exploring multimodalities of expression and meaning-making, and rejecting the need to pursue a singular authorial vision (Perry 65). In *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, theatre scholar Alison Oddey observes that devised performance emerges from “assembling, editing, and re-shaping individuals’ contradictory experiences of the world” (1). In other words, the form, content, and function of devised theatre is determined by the lived experiences and interests of the ensemble. Oddey goes on to describe devised theatre as “the fragmentary experience of understanding ourselves, our culture, and the world we inhabit” (1). With this, Oddey positions devised theatre as the deeply human process of making and remaking ourselves in relation to other human beings and the world. This creative process requires us to see ourselves from inside and out, on our own and in community, and to make sense of that seeing through performance. In PJP, the devising process supports individuals on a personal journey of self-identification, and in turn cultivates perspective sharing and community visioning of justice in action.

Performing Justice Project History and Structure

Created in 2010 by Megan Alrutz, Lynn Hoare, and Kristen Hogan, The Performing Justice Project was initially developed as a program of the Center for Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Texas at Austin in partnership with the Embrey Critical Human Rights Initiative, a project funded by the Embrey Family Foundation to develop high school level women’s studies courses, as outlined on the PJP website (“History”).

Following a successful pilot project at Gonzola Garza Independence High School in Austin, the Embrey Family Foundation continued to support PJP partnerships with juvenile “justice” centers, foster care facilities, and high schools from 2011-2017. After the Garza High School pilot, Alrutz, Hoare, and Hogan shifted the project model from looking at women’s human rights broadly to intentionally focusing on race and gender justice. In their book *Devising Critically Engaged Theatre with Youth: The Performing Justice Project*, Alrutz and Hoare build on critical race scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw’s discussion of intersectionality as they assert, “Performing justice requires us to hold ourselves, PJP participants, and PJP itself accountable to the fact that injustice is systematically racialized and gendered in the US and around the world” (6). Alrutz and Hoare further build on Race Forward’s 2014 online publication “Moving the Race Conversation Forward,” arguing that by centering race and gender as entry points for exploring justice with youth, PJP aims to disrupt the tendency for ‘categorical discussions around class or socioeconomics’ to ‘eclipse’ the inequities faced by womxn, non-binary, and femme people of color (qtd in Alrutz and Hoare 7). By specifically examining how race and gender intersect in matters of (in)justice, PJP works to expose and subvert the powerful systems of white supremacy and patriarchy at the root of social-political institutions and practices in the US.

From its inception, PJP has centered theatre and performance as a powerful method for exploring, envisioning, and enacting justice. As an applied drama/theatre program, PJP “imagine[s] theatre as both a way to perform and practice justice” (Alrutz and Hoare 5). In other words, PJP uses drama/theatre throughout rehearsals to reflect on and investigate race, gender, and power in order to practice what justice might look like in participants’ lives. The PJP ensemble further performs justice by devising and eventually sharing an often public performance that centers youth voice in the ongoing struggle for race and gender justice. Through this iterative process of creation and performance, PJP participants

move through a scaffolded series of critically engaged theatre strategies, or what Alrutz and Hoare call “performance actions.” Performance actions engage the body and “encourage young people to recognize the reality of systemic oppressions while also supporting and acknowledging their personal agency and individual empowerment” (Alrutz and Hoare 6). In this way, PJP adopts an asset driven approach to justice work and highlights the potential for youth artists to shift systemically unjust social-political conditions through an ensemble-based devising process that encourages personal identity development and individual/collective action.

Throughout each Performing Justice Project residency, an ensemble of young people participates in various performance actions to both explore relevant (in)justice content and generate potential material for a devised culminating devised performance. As the project progresses, youth artists shape the content explored and the process of exploration, based on their unique stories, interests, and talents. Though the process and final product of each project is uniquely shaped by the specific perspectives and interests of the youth participants and teaching artists involved, all projects tend to follow a similar devising process. As Alrutz and Hoare observe:

Because we know young people’s lives are steeped in inequities, we structure our devising process to focus first on their experiences and interests. We begin with reflections on self, then explore power and relationships with others, and finally address identity-based bias and relationships between self, others, and society. These three phases, namely preparing, producing, and performing, combined with the PJP performance actions, offer a framework for moving toward a critically engaged, hopeful theatre making process. (71)

With this structure, PJP invites participants to consider how race and gender impact them on individual, relational, and systemic levels, while simultaneously building an ensemble-based performance that envisions justice in participants’ lives and communities. The PJP

model moves from the personal to the political by way of three core questions (Alrutz and Hoare 55).

Who am I?

To begin, PJP participants name and reflect on their own identities. Through individual and ensemble performance actions, youth artists define race, ethnicity, gender, and attraction as they consider how their intersectional identities show up and impact their lives. During this exploration, the ensemble also builds foundational collaboration and performance skills, while devising original creative material that might be developed further for the final performance.

What is (in)justice and how does it show up in my life?

In the middle section of the process, participants explore the intersections of race, gender, and power on individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic levels. Participants move their personal story work from *Who am I?* into conversation with larger systems, by using embodiment and creative writing to understand multi-layered oppression and privilege. The ensemble further collaborates to devise poems, scenes, and/or movement pieces that expose and resist racial and gender injustice.

How do I perform justice?

As PJP nears the final sharing or performance, youth artists imagine what race and gender justice looks like in their lives. Participants collaborate to refine and stage stories or other performance material that emerged throughout the residency in order to develop a cohesive script. With PJP teaching artists and designers, the ensemble also experiments with sound, space, and other theatrical aesthetics to

stage their work. In the culminating performance, artists and audience consider their role in enacting justice through action and reflection, while embracing youth-led performance as an act of justice itself.

Significance of Study

With this project, I hope to articulate for myself and the field an “aesthetics of healing” in order to help teaching artists understand how aesthetic development relates to healing and justice within a performance-building process with youth. Using the Performing Justice Project program model, this study centers young people as vital agents in the ongoing pursuit of racial and gender justice, while exploring the potential of collaborative performance to create change. Adopting a decolonized understanding of trauma, I recognize that oppressive systems like white supremacy and patriarchy cause and perpetuate trauma, thus effort toward racial and gender justice must also involve consideration of healing. I especially see a need for healing centered approaches to devising with young people in spaces like Resident Place, where youth autonomy is limited as a result of policies meant to promote safety. By examining assumptions about aesthetics in ADT and analyzing the relationship between aesthetics and healing in this project, I aim to encourage ADT artists to imagine new ways to “perform justice” when devising with youth.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In this paper, I share my experience in an applied drama/theatre project with youth that examined racial and gender justice through devised performance. I began the project interested in exploring the relationship between healing and aesthetics in applied drama/theatre, in hopes of identifying an “aesthetics of healing” in order to understand how

I might further support a healing process when devising toward justice with youth. Alongside my creative partner in the PJP, Faith Hillis, I designed this project using the Performing Justice Project performance-building structure, which meets diverse participants where they are and invites young people to collaborate to reflect on and imagine justice together.

In this first chapter, I outlined my research questions, provided an overview of the applied drama/theatre project, and described the background and significance of this research study. I offer my understanding of a decolonized, anti-racist understanding of trauma and interrogate the social construction of youth and children, in order to contextualize the environment and experience of youth participants at Resident Place. I defined healing centered engagement and applied drama/theatre, which I use as guiding frameworks for my practice and research. I also shared a detailed description of the history, pedagogy, and aesthetic focus of the Performing Justice Project. I further named the significance of this study, which is to imagine new ways of devising with youth that consider the relationship between aesthetics, healing, and justice.

In Chapter Two, I analyze the experience of the ensemble during each phase of the project: design, rehearsal, and performance. I begin by providing an overview of the pilot project, including a brief discussion of key discoveries. I then offer further description about how I collected and analyzed data throughout the project. Through a detailed and reflective analysis of the project, I study how healing centered engagement emerged and impacted the design, rehearsal, and performance.

In Chapter Three, my final chapter, I situate this document within the unique time it has been written. I provide an overview of Americans for the Arts' "Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes in Excellence in Arts for Change" and offer a brief analysis of how the aesthetic attributes outlined in the framework impacted the PJP ensemble's experience.

I then offer recommendations toward an “aesthetics of healing” that centers the three attributes (i.e. commitment, openness, and disruption) that emerged through my data analysis as significant to the project process and product. I follow this with limitations of the study and closing thoughts on devising toward justice with youth.

When I described my deep feeling of knowing to my mom after that first TATIP workshop, I only had vague ideas of what applied drama/theatre was and never used the words “aesthetics” or “pedagogy,” but I knew to trust the truth I sensed in my body. Five years later as a budding ADT artist-researcher, I felt a similar embodied knowing that I was “in the right place” during our first few PJP rehearsals at Resident Place. As I set out on the path toward and through my thesis research, I seek not only to understand the restored sense of belonging, purpose, and agency that I have experienced within aesthetic collaborations, but also to explore how I might engage healing for myself and participants through my aesthetic and pedagogical approach as a teaching artist.

Chapter Two

And I think it is healing behavior, to look at something so broken and see the possibility and wholeness in it.

—adrienne maree brown

At times I find the never-ending process of uncovering the layers of injustice and harm that shape social systems, institutions, and relationships, as well as internal thoughts and assumptions, to be overwhelming, disorienting, and isolating. I often think about how much easier it would be to pretend that so much of the world is not broken, acknowledging the personal privilege that such ignorance requires. But when I stray from the path toward justice, adrienne maree brown always gently guides me back, reminding me that from brokenness comes the **healing possibility of wholeness**.

In this chapter I explore the experience of the ensemble through all phases of the Performing Justice Project in order to understand how opportunities for healing emerge in a justice-focused applied drama/theatre project. I begin with a brief summary of the summer 2019 PJP pilot at Resident Place, which preceded my MFA thesis project. Next, I introduce and outline my data collection and analysis process for my thesis study. I follow with a detailed description of the development, implementation, and performance of the Performing Justice Project at Resident Place in fall 2019, which aimed to support embodied healing through an ensemble-based performance-building process. Throughout this description, I use Shawn Ginwright's healing centered engagement theory to analyze how ensemble-based devising provided opportunities for individual and collective healing in PJP. I further reflect on some of the ways our process fell short of its healing potential. To conclude, I examine my findings across all three phases of the project and highlight key discoveries about the possibility of healing within applied drama/theatre projects and processes.

PJP AT RESIDENT PLACE: PARTNERSHIP HISTORY

Partnership Development: Learning and Adapting

I came to graduate school eager to intentionally guide and develop my teaching artist practice toward and within justice work. While I was immediately drawn to the Performing Justice Project, there were no active projects running in Austin when I started at UT in the fall of 2017. Eventually, I approached Faith Hillis⁴, fellow MFA candidate turned artistic partner, about creating our own PJP community partnership and residency. Thus, in the fall of 2018, Faith and I began to plant the seeds that would eventually grow into this thesis study.

After researching the pedagogy and practice of PJP and mapping out our own project ideas, Faith and I began contacting potential community partners in February 2019. We reached out to youth detention centers, foster care facilities, and youth activism organizations in and around Austin, TX. We eventually connected with Selena Coburn, a Registered Dance Movement Therapist and the Recreation Coordinator at Resident Place, a residency for young people living within foster care. According to their website, Resident Place serves "individuals who have experienced severe emotional trauma, abuse and neglect" by offering "a continuum of care, support, and resources" in order to "promote healing and growth." PJP had partnered with Resident Place once in the past, but according to Megan Alrutz the project faced (understandable) challenges around attendance and the staff involved no longer worked at Resident Place. When we first reached out to Selena, she had never heard of PJP but quickly supported the idea of including the project in Resident Places's summer programming.

⁴ Because PJP engages directly with discussions of race and gender identity, it is worth noting that Faith identifies as a Black, cisgender woman. As mentioned in Chapter One, I identify as a white, cisgender woman.

During our initial conversations with Selena, we discussed both the possibilities and challenges of leading PJP at Resident Place. Like with the previous project at this site, one immediate challenge would be the changing and unpredictable composition of the participant ensemble. Selena explained that residents' schedules changed daily and that each individual's attendance at PJP could be impacted by multiple factors, including "bad days, medical appointments, and meetings with case workers" (Resident Place Partnership Meeting Notes, 26 April 2019). Selena emphasized the importance of boundaries at Resident Place and offered a few examples of institutional rules, like young people not being allowed to touch one another or refer to each other as "best friends." Selena also shared some concerns about how the young people would "re-regulate" as they transitioned from the "free space" of PJP back to the normal rules of Resident Place. Faith and I thus planned to use our opening and closing rituals to support participants in coming in and out of the PJP space. We further agreed to check in with Selena if we thought participants might need more support after rehearsals. Together, Selena, Faith, and I decided the structure of the project would be a three-week intensive culminating in an invited performance on-site at Resident Place. Although we were offered a three-hour time slot on weekday afternoons in July for a total of forty-two rehearsal hours, Selena wondered if three hours would be too long for the young people. Throughout the project, Faith and I committed to remain flexible and open to adapting, shortening, and canceling rehearsals if necessary.

Key Discoveries from Summer Pilot

Although the July 2019 PJP intensive at Resident Place is not the focus of this study, the discoveries that emerged from that pilot project informed the design and implementation of the fall residency and are therefore salient to my discussion. As Selena

had predicted, attendance in our summer program was inconsistent, ranging anywhere from three to eight participants, and Faith and I never knew who would be present until the group arrived for rehearsal each day. The quality of participation also varied. At any given time in rehearsal, approximately half of the participants would actively engage in our planned performance actions and half of the participants would stay toward the perimeter of the room and do their own thing, such as listen to music, write, or draw. Applied theatre artist and scholar Nandita Dinesh conceptualizes the complexity of her experience building community with young men in a juvenile detention center by expanding on Gary Alan Fine and Lisa-Jo van Scott's idea of "wispy communities," or social connections that occur within temporary, restricted "micropublics" that have the "potential of being displaced" (32). While Dinesh observes that the men with whom she collaborated were working together "simply because of a (forced) shared circumstance," she further posits that a juvenile detention center is "an imagined community that is wispy because of how it is bounded by time and space" (32). In a similar way, our project at Resident Place engaged a "wispy" ensemble in that youth participants were connected only because they all happened to live at the same foster care residency at the same time and because they were each encouraged and/or compelled to attend PJP.

Though our wispy ensemble often demonstrated a seemingly authentic collaborative spirit, the ever-changing make-up and interest of the group presented a challenge as we attempted to build upon each rehearsal in order to deepen understanding of (in)justice and prepare for the final performance. More than once we repeated parts or all of rehearsals so we could catch up people who had been absent. In laying out an open and ever-changing foundation with the ensemble, we often prioritized talking about terms and ideas over generating performance content. I remember wanting to make sure the young people *understood* race, gender, and (in)justice before focusing on performance.

This thinking, however, undercut the fundamental PJP principle that performance itself is a legitimate method of understanding. Our approach also impacted the ensemble's preparation for the culminating performance, which Faith and I delayed inviting people to until a few days before out of fear that we might not have anything to share. However, after only one rehearsal with a script, the ensemble excitedly performed their original poems and embodied stories for a small audience.

The pilot project taught me a lot about navigating the rules and practices at Resident Place. Because of scheduling, Selena was on leave during the entirety of the summer pilot. As a result, the only staff Faith and I regularly interacted with were the rotating "house parents" who attended rehearsals. We moved through the first week and a half of the project without any oversight or engagement from staff leadership. We were therefore surprised at the end of week two when we were approached by the campus coordinator about "allegations" that had come up about some PJP participants. We learned that at Resident Place, the young people are not allowed to go to the restroom at the same time, a rule we had unknowingly seen ignored by participants and unenforced by staff in PJP rehearsals. Although Faith and I committed to making sure participants adhered to the bathroom policy moving forward, half of the participants were not allowed to return to PJP because they had not followed the single-use restroom policy. This meant that a couple of the most enthusiastically engaged participants in the ensemble no longer attended PJP. Though I was disappointed in the institution's response, I was also disappointed in myself for not seeking out the organization's policies at the beginning of the summer pilot. Upon reflection, I recognize that I avoided asking for details about the Resident Place "rules" so I would not feel obligated to police participant behavior during PJP. However, my desire to avoid heavy regulation meant that the participants and I ultimately lost our ability to make positive change within our shared system.

RESEARCH METHODS

Faith and I finished the summer project inspired by the youth artists and eager to build upon the pilot in order to continue to learn how to work within the Resident Place system to create change. Despite our challenges with the institutional rules during the summer, both the staff and participants at Resident Place expressed interest in doing a second Performing Justice Project residency. I decided to use this project for my thesis research project because I was curious what I might discover about justice work with youth, as well my own pedagogical and aesthetic approach to devising with young artists, by engaging in a rigorous reflective practice during PJP. As I developed my research questions and methods, I considered how to center youth voice and experience, as well as aesthetic development and critique throughout the performance-building and research process. My primary research question for this MFA thesis asks: *What is the experience of the ensemble within a justice-focused applied drama/theatre project and partnership?* Specifically, I wonder *how a healing centered approach to ADT impacts a youth-centered performance-building process*. I also consider *the relationship between aesthetics and healing*, in order to imagine new ways of seeking justice through devised theatre with youth.

When looking at the experiences of participants within this practice-based research project, I consider the “ensemble” to encompass every person who contributed to the performance process/product, which includes all youth artists who attended a rehearsal, as well as the adults who collaborated alongside them (i.e. key Resident Place staff, Faith, and myself). I employed a reflective practitioner methodology throughout the project process. As research Phillip Taylor claims, “The reflective practitioner stance demands a discovery of self, a recognition of how one interacts with other, and how others read and are read by this interaction” (27). In order to pursue a discovery of self, I collected data via

my ongoing reflective log about my experiences, observations, and questions from each rehearsal. I also documented my shared meeting notes, planning documents, and daily rehearsal facilitation plans with my project co-facilitator, Faith. As a part of our performance-building process, Faith and I also gathered data through photos of written, drawn, and embodied responses to performance actions and justice-focused discussions. We captured aesthetic artifacts which included: video and audio recordings of our rehearsal process; the final script; video recording of the performance; and audio recording of the final reflection. After the completion of the project, I examined all of my data, to construct what researchers Johnny Saldaña and Matt Omasta call “an analytic story-line” (11): a full narrative picture of the project from inception to performance. I built this story-line through a series of analytic vignettes that described the design, rehearsal, and performance phases of the project. I identified significant moments during each phase that appeared across data sets and examined my reflective log in relation to aesthetic artifacts and planning documents. I then analyzed my vignettes to understand how examples of healing centered engagement emerged within the ensemble through the design, rehearsal, and performance of PJP at Resident Place.

For my analysis, I engaged the healing centered framework that Shawn Ginwright outlines in his 2018 *Medium* article “The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement” (web). Ginwright defines healing centered engagement (HCE) as a holistic approach to working with youth that is “strength based, advances a collective view of healing, and re-centers culture as a central feature in well-being” (“The Future”). Positioned in contrast to trauma informed care, HCE is a “tectonic shift in how we view trauma” that emphasizes the interconnected nature of trauma, healing, identity, and culture (Ginwright “The Future”). Ginwright highlights four key elements of HCE, which are:

- Healing centered engagement is **explicitly political**, rather than clinical.
- Healing centered engagement is **culturally grounded** and views healing as the **restoration of identity**.
- Healing centered engagement is **asset driven** and **focuses on well-being** we want, rather than symptoms we want to suppress.
- Healing centered engagement **supports adult providers** with their own healing. (“The Future,” emphasis added)

Together the elements Ginwright puts forth support youth and youth workers in cultivating collective well-being (“The Future”). In order to analyze HCE within a performance-building process with youth, I understand each element as follows:

- HCE is **explicitly political** by addressing the systems that cause trauma rather than the symptoms caused by trauma. As a teaching artist, I emphasize that I do not have the experience or expertise to discuss healing from a clinical or medical standpoint.
- HCE is **culturally grounded** by inviting young people to learn and share about their culture(s). HCE further supports healing through the **restoration of identity**, or the process of claiming, exploring, and developing identity for oneself, thereby disrupting identity-based assumptions and judgements that are placed on young people by adults, communities, and systems.
- HCE is **asset-driven** and **focuses on well-being** by positioning youth as active agents in both envisioning and creating change in their own lives and communities.
- HCE **supports adult providers** by requiring that (adult) youth workers consider their own relationships to systems, power, identity, and culture in order to imagine and pursue well-being alongside youth.

Though healing-centered engagement or HCE is not an explicit goal of PJP, I recognize aspects of HCE in the overall project structure, specifically in the ways that PJP focuses on participant assets and identity development within a social-political context. Yet

I wonder, for the PJP ensemble, what does HCE look like in action? What is the role of aesthetics within a healing-centered process? To answer these questions, I looked at each phase of this project to see where Ginwright's four elements of HCE might be evidenced. Throughout the following descriptive analysis sections, I highlight where HCE was particularly evident in the design, rehearsal, and performance of PJP at Resident Place. I also examine missed opportunities for healing centered engagement throughout the project process.

PHASE ONE: FALL 2019 PROJECT DESIGN

In this section, I consider the design of our Fall 2019 Performing Justice Program through an analysis of our fall planning documents, including meeting notes, correspondences with Selena, and various drafts of the project exploration path. First, I reflect on how learning from the pilot shaped the logistical structure of the fall iteration of PJP at Resident Place. I then describe the four goals that Faith and I identified for the fall project and analyze how elements of HCE did or did not emerge within each goal. I conclude this section with a brief analysis of how the design of this project supported ensemble healing.

Looking Back to Move Forward

Faith and I finished the summer project inspired by the youth artists and eager to build upon the pilot in order to continue to learn how to work within the Resident Place system to create change. Despite our challenges with the institutional rules during the summer, both the staff and participants at Resident Place expressed interest in doing a second Performing Justice Project residency. In August 2019, Faith and I began working with Selena to design a fall project that responded to both the successes and challenges of

the summer pilot. We shifted from a three-week intensive model to an ongoing ten-week structure with two rehearsals per week. We shortened each rehearsal time to one and a half hours, since as Selena predicted, our summer ensemble struggled to maintain focus during the three-hour rehearsal blocks. For the fall, we were offered rehearsal time during the evenings on Tuesdays (6-7:30p) and directly after school on Wednesdays (3:30-5p). As we did in the summer, Faith and I agreed to remain open to shifting or canceling rehearsals as necessary. We planned two extra rehearsals leading up to the performance in Week Nine, as well as one reflection workshop in Week Ten, with a planned total of thirty-five project hours from September to November.

As I analyzed my logistical field notes and artifacts from our fall planning documents, I notice a (re)commitment to performance as a powerful means for individual identity development, as well as a tool for collective envisioning of justice. In addition to shifts in the structure and timeline for our fall project, Faith and I also made key adjustments in the exploration of the justice content and the development of the performance, based on our learning from the summer and our tendency to focus on dialogue over embodiment or performance actions. We outlined the following goals for our fall PJP program at Resident Place:

- I. Push and center aesthetic goals of final performance
- II. Organize the performance and production elements early
- III. Explore spaces of nuance that came up from this summer, while also making space for new folx⁵
- IV. Frame that these conversations (race+gender justice) are lifelong (Meeting Notes, 29 August 2019)

⁵ We use the spelling “folx” instead of “folks” in an effort recognize all gender identities and specifically include people who do not identify within the gender binary.

Each of these goals shaped our design and implementation of the fall project in specific ways. Below I describe and analyze each goal in order to examine the ways that opportunities for healing came up in the structures that Faith and I laid out in the residency design. Then I will consider if our goals were emblematic of a move towards healing centered engagement in the planning of a PJP process.

Goal One: Push and center aesthetic goals

In response to the hurried, thrown-together feeling of the summer final performance, Faith and I explicitly sought to “value aesthetic work as much as social justice work” and “scaffold development of theatre/performance skills early” (Meeting Notes, 29 August 2019) in the fall project. It is worth noting that Faith and I did not define what our specific “aesthetic goals” were, nor did we identify how we would measure the “value” of aesthetic work. Nevertheless, we decided to use embodied performance early and often in rehearsals. For example, instead of journaling as our opening ritual as we had in the summer, we began each rehearsal by playing “Two by three by Bradford,” a game developed by theatre artist and scholar Augusto Boal in which participants create a repetitive sequence of sound and gesture combinations with a partner (106). As drama-based pedagogy educators and scholars Kathryn Dawson and Bridget Kiger Lee observe, embodied rituals like Bradford help to establish a collaborative environment that “values multiple interpretations and multimodal expression” (60). In this way, using Bradford as an opening ritual created an opportunity to build an ensemble culture that honored diverse perspectives/identities and multiple ways of expressing. I further hoped that regularly practicing physical expression and exchange would support participants in expanding their comfort and creativity with gesture in performance. By (re)centering the performance

development, Faith and I embraced Ginwright's idea that "expression is the key to healing" (*Hope* 37) and began to lift up embodied ways of knowing.

Faith and I further wanted to expand the performance styles and perspectives with which participants engaged, so we invited a number of guest artists to lead workshops and collaborate with the ensemble throughout our process. We asked siri gurudev, Colombian performance artist and trans feminist, to explore gender through embodied discussion and creative writing with participants. Michael J. Love, Black, queer man and interdisciplinary tap dance artist-scholar, was invited to share sound and rhythm performance tools with the ensemble as inspiration for their final performance. PJP sound and production designers, Jada Cadena (queer, Latinx designer and performer) and Rebecca Drew Ramsey (theatre artist and educator) respectively, were asked to collaborate directly with youth artists to devise the aesthetic look and sound of the performance. In addition to offering artistic techniques and mediums different from our own, each of these remarkable artists also holds different race and/or gender identities from Faith and myself. I hoped that inviting other adult artists into our process might create additional opportunities for youth artists to experience "collective identity" and/or "ethnic pride" in order to support cultural healing (Ginwright *Hope* 26). I was further excited to involve these inspiring friends and colleagues in PJP because of the potential I saw for diverse aesthetic approaches to enhance the final performance.

Goal Two: Organize performance production elements early

During planning, Faith and I recognized that if we wanted to center aesthetics in the final performance, we had to be accountable to the logistical decisions and tasks necessary for producing the event. In addition to outlining clear deadlines for designing and ordering t-shirts and programs, two elements we did not procure in time for the summer

pilot, we also decided to host the final performance in a black box studio space at UT Austin. As a “studio project” at UT, we gained access to a performance space as well as a \$500 budget for the project. This small budget was especially helpful because Resident Place was unable to contribute any financial or material resources to PJP in the fall. I was also excited by the potential that a more formal theatre space had to elevate the lighting design and use of space beyond what was possible in the conference room we used for the summer performance. Faith reminded me, though, that holding the performance at UT might make it difficult for members of the Resident Place community to attend due to staff, transportation, and scheduling policies. Committed to offering the ensemble the opportunity to share their voices with people from Resident Place, Faith and I arranged for two performances, the first at Resident Place and the second at UT.

Goal Three: Explore spaces of nuance while making space for new people

In the pilot project, Faith and I framed the examination of race, ethnicity, gender, attraction, and power in fairly broad terms, focusing on general definitions and ideas rather than specifically examining particular practices and expressions of injustice in-depth. From this wide-angle approach, the ensemble identified a number of complex every day examples of and questions about race and gender (in)justice, such as the cultural significance of hair and (mis)appropriation of culturally situated hairstyles; the ethics of who can reclaim what language; and the impact of cancel culture⁶ on justice work. Moving into the fall PJP residency, Faith and I planned to further explore some of the summer ensemble’s examples, questions, and “spaces of nuance.” We also knew we wanted (and needed) to design an exploration path that welcomed youth artists who had not been a part

⁶ “Cancel culture” refers to the current tendency to “cancel” people, especially public figures, by culturally blocking them from “having a prominent public platform or career” (Romano).

of the pilot project to participate as fully as veteran artists. In this way, we aimed to build on each participant's assets and expertise while continuing to expand the ensemble's shared understanding of systemic and systematic injustice, thereby recognizing that both "trauma and healing are experienced collectively" (Ginwright "The Future"). To guide our ensemble journey, Faith and I considered how we might highlight the intersections of the three PJP guiding questions (e.g. Who am I? What is (in)justice and how does it show up in my life? How do I perform justice?), rather than organize the project into three distinct sections. Rather than exploring race and gender identity and then exploring how identity intersects with power to create injustice, we wondered how the process might shift if we examined racialized and gendered identity and injustice at the same time.

We planned to spend the first two weeks establishing a foundation in general identity and justice terms (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, power, oppression, etc.), as well as ensemble and performance skills. In Week Three, we then intended to invite the ensemble to specifically consider their relationship to gender by examining examples of how gender and attraction are represented in popular culture, thereby simultaneously exploring personal identity and gender injustice. Moving into Weeks Three and Four, we hoped to continue to examine the intersection of identity and power on personal and systemic levels, through specific, relevant examples of (in)justice, like cultural appropriation and cancel culture. Toward these goals, we outlined the following exploration path:

Exploration Path	
Week One	Ensemble and Performance Foundation
Week Two	Identity and Justice Foundation
Week Three	Representation of Gender and Attraction in Pop Culture
Week Four	Cultural Appropriation (Race and Ethnicity)
Week Five	Cancel Culture
Week Six	Work through possible script material
Week Seven	Work through possible script material
Week Eight	Finalize script
Week Nine	Dress rehearsals and performance(s)
Week Ten	Reflection

Table 1: Initial PJP Exploration Path (11 September 2019)

Because Faith and I planned to position this project as a continuation of the foundation laid in the summer, we expressed to Selena that it would help anchor our fall exploration if at least half of the group had been a part of the project in the summer. We further acknowledged that while we knew consistent attendance by everyone would not be possible, we hoped that we might be able to work with a fairly consistent core ensemble throughout the fall. Selena supported both of these requests and considered them as she recruited participants for the project. Thus, Faith and I embraced the task of designing an exploration of race and gender (in)justice with varied opportunities to deepen understanding and engage with multiple entry points.

Goal Four: Frame that race and gender justice conversations are lifelong

Throughout the pilot project, Faith and I frequently discussed the rate of the ensemble's journey toward justice, or the way in which as individuals and a group they recognized and seemed called to challenge oppressive systems and practices in action. At times, Faith and I expressed disappointment to each other about our inability to identify concrete examples of substantial change from/within participants, though with some distance I realize that I was not even sure what kinds of "concrete" examples I was looking for. As activist and writer adrienne maree brown observes, "the pace and pathways of change" are "nonlinear and iterative" (103). With this, brown reminds us that the pursuit of race and gender justice has no defined path, nor ideal speed. Change is not created as a result of a singular conversation, experience, or project. Instead change emerges from an ongoing process that encourages regularly repeating, revisiting, and reimagining ways of knowing and growing. To ground the fall project in the ongoing nature of change work, Faith and I explicitly recognized that "we won't solve, fix, or completely understand everything" (Meeting Notes, 29 August 2019). We further intended to "include participants in conversations about what we focus on" in order to highlight multiple routes toward justice (Meeting Notes, 29 August 2019). As our original exploration path outlines, we planned to have four weeks of rehearsal focused solely on developing the script and preparing for the performance. By making more time to collaborate with youth artists on the script than we had in the summer, Faith and I imagined the final performance as what educator and scholar Maisha T. Winn calls "a site for boundary-crossing social engagement" (32). An expert on restorative justice in schools, Winn argues that a restorative approach to teaching and learning creates opportunities for "stakeholders to achieve freedom and justice through the practice of defining and redefining themselves and those around them" (32). In other words, restorative practices engage all stakeholders, not

just young people, in the ongoing process of deconstructing, reconstructing, and situating their individual identities within a shared cultural context and history. With PJP, Faith and I embarked on our own journeys of healing from the impacts of white supremacy and patriarchy as we sought to “define and redefine” ourselves alongside youth artists. In this way, I hoped to practice with the ensemble how “performing justice” is an ongoing, iterative, and *healing* process.

Designing Toward Healing Centered Engagement in PJP

As I consider the design phase of PJP in relationship to Ginwright’s four elements of HCE (i.e. explicitly political, culturally grounded in the restoration of identity, asset driven and focused on well-being, supports adult providers), I notice several key alignments. For example, by choosing to work within and across complex systems at UT and Resident Place, Faith and I situated the fall project as explicitly political. Ginwright asserts that healing from trauma occurs by *acknowledging and challenging* “the conditions that created the trauma in the first place” (“The Future”). In other words, naming and addressing harm/injustice is necessary to enable healing/justice. Ginwright, Etheridge Woodson, and other youth studies scholars further remind us that communities, institutions, and individuals who work with youth often implement protectionist policies that ultimately impact young people’s access to self- identification and expression. As Alrutz and Hoare point out, such youth-centered policies are also inherently racialized and gendered (6). Leading into the fall, Faith and I aimed to disrupt the tendency for constructs of race and gender to be placed on young people by supporting youth in finding ways to restore, or (re)claim, their identities for themselves, while navigating systems of power on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional levels. In this way, Faith and I designed the fall project to cultivate what critical race theorist Tara J. Yosso calls “navigational capital,”

or the ability to move and maneuver through social institutions “not created with Communities of Color in mind” (80). Put another way, navigational capital *acknowledges and challenges* harmful practices of institutions steeped in white supremacy and patriarchy, thereby creating an opportunity for healing. In this way, the design of this project pursued healing justice by inviting the ensemble to interrogate how systems of power and control shape institutions and relationships that impact our individual and collective lives.

Another discovery from my examination of our design documents is Faith and I recommitted to employing a performative pedagogy in the ensemble’s process of claiming and expressing personal identity, while developing a sense of cultural belonging in both PJP and the world. Educator and scholar John T. Warren defines performative pedagogy as a way of teaching and learning that asks:

Students and teachers to be embodied researchers—to take learning to the body in order to come to know in a more full and powerful way. It is to liberate the body from the shackles of a dualism that privileges the mind over the visceral.
 (“Performative” 95)

Performative pedagogy, then, centers the body as a powerful site for knowing, understanding, and sharing. Warren and Deanna L. Fassett further observe that performative pedagogy places “the question of identity in the space of performance” (“Subverting” 414). In their book, Alrutz and Hoare discuss why they use performance in justice work with youth, arguing that “performance puts forward ideas about our bodies, our lived experiences, and ultimately our communities” (14). In this way, PJP explores identity through performance in order to encourage the ensemble to consider how identity sits in our bodies, as well as how we “perform” identity in the world. By explicitly naming a recommitment to performance aesthetics in our fall project goals, I realize that part of my own focus on the well-being I want is a belief in the healing possibility of performance. It is worth noting, however, that during the design process Faith and I did not actually talk to

the youth artists in the PJP ensemble about what well-being looks like for them. We made choices based on what we learned and observed during the pilot, but we never offered an opportunity for youth participants to reflect on our summer work or articulate their individual/collective goals for the project. With this, Faith and I missed a critical step toward healing by neglecting to center the assets and desires of the youth involved.

PHASE TWO: FALL 2019 REHEARSAL PROCESS

In this section, I analyze my reflective log, daily rehearsal plans, and aesthetic artifacts from rehearsal, including photos, video, and audio recordings of performance actions in order to examine how healing centered engagement emerged throughout the rehearsal process. First, I reflect on how ensemble attendance and participation varied throughout the fall project. I then describe our overall rehearsal structures and rituals and offer a detailed example of one performance action from Rehearsal #9 that stands out as an exemplar of HCE in PJP. I further examine how some of the logistical realities at Resident Place created some barriers to healing through ensemble performance. I conclude this section with a brief discussion of how healing centered engagement emerged throughout the rehearsal process of PJP at Resident Place.

Ensemble and Participation

Just as in the pilot project, challenges with participant attendance required Faith and I to be both flexible and adaptive throughout the fall at Resident Place. Over the course of our ten weeks at Resident Place we worked with a total of fourteen youth participants, though there were never more than eight participants at one rehearsal. Only one participant attended our first rehearsal and over the following few weeks, attendance and participation was inconsistent and unpredictable, making it hard to actually build the foundation that

Faith and I had so intentionally mapped out. In Table 2 “PJP Participants,” I share the roster of youth artists involved in the fall project at Resident Place. I note how many rehearsals each person attended, whether they performed in the final sharing at UT, and whether they participated in the PJP summer pilot. Looking at the eight participants who performed in the final sharing, I observe that the attendance rate ranges widely from 40% (Star) to 90% (Confidence) of the seventeen total rehearsals.

Name⁷	Number of Rehearsals Attended (17 total)	Performed in Final Sharing	Participated in Summer Pilot
Confidence	15	Yes	Yes
AsSu	12	Yes	No
AV	9.5	Yes	No
North Baby	9	Yes	Yes
Timya	9	No	No
Cookie	8	Yes	No
Ciana	7	Yes	No
Adrianna	7	Yes	Yes
Star	6.5	Yes	Yes
E	5.5	No	No
R	3	No	No
H	2	No	Yes
A	2	No	No
Y	1	No	No

Table 2: PJP Participants

⁷ Informed by educator and scholar Kathleen Gallagher’s practice-based research in high schools, I invited participants to choose their own pseudonyms (239). For participants who did not provide a pseudonym, I assigned a random letter in place of a name.

The fluctuations in attendance were due to a range of factors. For example, some participants would not be allowed to come to a rehearsal because they were “stabilizing,” a term used at Resident Place to describe a young person’s process of re-regulating after a “bad day” or “hospitalization.” Other times, participants would miss rehearsal because their care team had scheduled other required events during the same time, including family visits, counseling, tutoring, and haircuts. There were also other programs that ran at the same time as PJP that prevented some people from attending. In response to this double (or triple) booking, we eventually decided to cancel Tuesday rehearsals during Weeks Four through Seven of the project.

In addition to fairly erratic attendance, we also did not have as many pilot PJP participants in the fall ensemble as we had initially hoped. As much as Faith and I had wanted to build on our work from the summer, we quickly realized that we needed to establish a new foundation with this new ensemble. As a result, we revised our exploration path after almost every rehearsal in order to “move at the speed of trust” (brown 42) and prioritize relationships and critical connections over a pre-determined idea of how the process “should” develop. We eventually decided to drop the “nuanced” inquiries that we had originally outlined for the fall and opted to explore race and gender (in)justice broadly, much like we had in the summer. As such, our final exploration path diverged from what we outlined in September, as seen in Table 3.

	Initial Exploration Path <i>(September 11, 2019)</i>	Final Exploration Path <i>(November 12, 2019)</i>
Week One	Ensemble and Performance Foundation	Ensemble and Performance Foundation
Week Two	Identity and Justice Foundation	Identity Foundation
Week Three	Representation of Gender and Attraction in Pop Culture	Power and (In)Justice Foundation
Week Four	Cultural Appropriation (Race and Ethnicity)	Gender and Attraction
Week Five	Cancel Culture	Race and Ethnicity
Week Six	Work through possible script material	Injustice
Week Seven	Work through possible script material	Justice
Week Eight	Finalize script	Work through script
Week Nine	Dress rehearsals and performance(s)	Dress rehearsals and performance(s)
Week Ten	Reflection	Reflection

Table 3: Revision of PJP Exploration Path from beginning to end of project

Perhaps the most notable shift in our ever-evolving exploration path was that we ended up cutting the number of weeks dedicated specifically to developing and rehearsing the final performance script from four weeks to two weeks. Because of the frequent changes in our rehearsal schedule and participant group, Faith and I ultimately took more of a lead in the decision-making process than we had intended for the final devised performance. While we had more control over the theatrical structure and content focus of the performance script than the ensemble at this key stage in the creative process, we invited the ensemble to share their feedback and/or revise the script drafts that we set out

at each rehearsal. The shape of the script, therefore, continued to evolve as the youth artists came in and out of rehearsals during the final weeks. As Nandita Dinesh observes about her own work devising theatre with young men who are incarcerated, “The control that I had in shaping the structure of the script...was temporary. / Fleeting / ‘Wispy’” (25-26). Like Dinesh, Faith and I had to balance logistical constraints like time and attendance with our goal for a youth-centered process and performance, which at times required us exercising “temporary control” over aesthetic decisions. For example, Faith and I had hoped to work with the ensemble in rehearsal to develop the “Justice Poem” collaboratively (see Appendix A). As we neared the final performance, however, we realized that we would not have time as an ensemble to work on every piece of the script together. So, I created the “Justice Poem” on my own, outside of rehearsal. Although virtually every word that I used in the poem derived from youth artist responses to various performance actions, I had complete control over what responses were included and how they were grouped, as well as the overall poem structure and flow. In this way, our rehearsal process relied on Faith’s and my assets as theatre and teaching artists to share our aesthetic insights and experience with youth artists both in and out of rehearsal. I wonder, though, what was missed in removing the bulk of script development from rehearsals? How might we consider collaborative script development as a process of imagining “collective well-being”? (Ginwright “The Future”). What opportunities might there be for youth and adult artists to collaborate toward healing through shared script development? With questions like these I continue to reflect on and critique the wispy nature of our PJP rehearsal process.

Rehearsal Structure and Rituals

We began each rehearsal by going over the agenda written on the board which offered participants an overview of what to expect that day. We then moved through a

Check-in, a ritual that builds community and collective care by recognizing the “lives we live both in and outside of the space” (Biedrzycki qtd. in Johnston and Brownrigg 75). Alrutz and Hoare emphasize that because the PJP process “requires building trust, connection, and relationships,” (78) daily check-ins at the top of rehearsal communicate that “PJP directors and teaching artists care about participants” (79). Our check-in prompts varied across rehearsals and usually invited participants to share a quick fact about themselves or a brief statement on how they were feeling coming into the space. We would follow the Check-in with our warm-up game, “Two by three by Bradford,” intended to develop skills in listening, rhythm, physical gesture, and collaboration. As I look at our weekly facilitation plans and my recorded reflections on our activities, I note that during the first few rehearsals, the warm-up served primarily to build ensemble and introduce participants to the participatory, active, and performative nature of PJP. Eventually, Faith and I invited youth artists to consider the “word of the day” when creating their sound and gesture sequences within Two by Three by Bradford. Each word of the day related to the theme and guiding question for the rehearsal. This additional interpretive layer in the warm-up challenged participants to make and express meaning through embodied performance.

The two to three performance actions that followed the warm-up were scaffolded around the overarching PJP themes and questions outlined earlier in this chapter. These main performance actions engaged participants in multimodal strategies for personal reflection, critical exchange, and creative expression. We ended each workshop with “I have a voice,”⁸ a closing ritual in which someone leads the group in a call and response of the following: “I have a voice. / My voice is powerful. / My voice can change the world.”

⁸ I learned “I have a voice” from Community Word Project, where it is a common closing ritual in residencies.

Participants almost immediately requested to lead “I have a voice,” so we passed the responsibility from person to person throughout rehearsals. These rituals to begin and end rehearsal functioned similarly to the opening and closing “ceremony” in restorative circles, through which “participants learn that they can be present with themselves and one another in a way that is different from an ordinary meeting or group” (Boyes-Watson and Pranis, 29). Thus our opening rituals encouraged the ensemble to take time to feel and “be in our humanity” (brown 105) as we set intentions for our shared work. On the other end, our closing rituals marked the ensemble’s transition back to our “ordinary” lives. By ending each rehearsal with “I have a Voice,” Faith and I invited participants to claim (and perform) their personal power to create change in the world. In this way our closing ritual highlighted individual and collective agency, or the healing power “to transform problems in to possibilities” (Ginwright *Hope* 25).

Rehearsal Snapshot: Activating Statistics

In Rehearsal 9, Faith and I facilitated a PJP performance action called “Activating Statistics” (Alrutz and Hoare 222). The process of this devising sequence invites participants to collaborate to create an embodied and performative response to current statistics that represent identity-based oppressions (Alrutz and Hoare 222). As Alrutz and Hoare observe, “Statistics offer a picture of the real-world impact of identity-based oppressions and help young people connect their own experiences to a larger sense of justice in the world” (222). In this way, “Activating Statistics” exposes systems of oppression through quantitative examples of injustice, in order to consider how individual experience relates to broad and deep needs for justice. For this reason, I see that “Activating Statistics” creates the possibility for healing by inviting youth artists to consider their lives and identities within the shared political context of identity-based injustice.

In preparation for this rehearsal, I gathered a robust list of statistics from the last decade that highlight the systemic reality of racial and gender injustice in the US. Together, Faith and I then identified the statistics that we thought would be most relevant to the youth artists at Resident Place (see Appendix B). The statistics we shared with the ensemble in Rehearsal 9 focused on racial inequities for girls in educational contexts, school-based harassment of LGBT youth, racial disparities in youth arrests, and unfair criminalization of gay and transgender youth (Rehearsal Outline, 30 October 2019). During our discussion of the statistics, the ensemble quickly articulated how the data represented injustice and referenced their own personal experiences they saw reflected in the statistics (Reflective Log, 30 October 2019). While dominant discourses often erase/ignore how systemic injustice impacts young people—especially youth of color; young womxn; and trans, non-binary, and queer youth—this performance action named explicit examples of the effects of white supremacy and patriarchy on youth in the world. These real-world examples of injustice offered an opportunity for youth artists to name and claim their own experiences with identity-based oppression. I further understand this naming and claiming to be a part of the healing process of restoring identity, rescuing self-identification from the social forces that construct and impose harmful labels, assumptions, and ideas on individuals and communities.

After an overview and discussion of the statistics broadly, we split into two groups and jumped into creating short tableaux and/or short scenes to accompany specific numbers. I noted in my reflective log that I was pleased that “we didn’t belabor the discussion part and got up quickly into the expression,” which disrupted the cerebral and “couchy” energy and activity of the rehearsal thus far (Reflective Log, 30 October 2019). Faith and I each worked with a different group, acting as an outside/directorial eye as the youth artists worked together to devise an embodied expression of their chosen statistic(s).

By exploring the statistics through embodied devising, rather than verbal discussion, we relied on youth artists' embodied knowledge as well as the ensemble's assets as performers and collaborators within this (healing) performance action.

Eventually the two groups then came back together to share their short performances with each other. I was especially struck by the short scene created by Timya, AsSu, and Confidence, who worked with Faith. This group chose to work with the following statistic from a 2016 report from The Sentencing Project: "In 2013, 40% of youth committed to juvenile facilities were African American. Native youth were more than 3x more likely to be committed than White youth. Hispanic youth were 1.6x more likely to be committed" (Rovner). The performance piece began with Timya and AsSu pantomiming playing dice onstage while Faith read offstage the part of the statistic that references African American youth. Confidence then walked onstage and pointed at the dice players (see Figure 1), prompting them to turn and face the audience while raising their hands over their heads before resting in a subdued position, AsSu on her knees with her head down and hands behind her back and Timya laying on the ground with her arms clasped behind her back (see Figure 2). When Faith began to read the second part of the statistic about Native and Hispanic youth, Timya stood up and Confidence came back onstage and they both moved toward AsSu who remained on her knees looking down. Timya took out a marker and pantomimed writing something (perhaps a legal citation) while Confidence acted as if she was securing AsSu's hands behind her back. In the final beat of the scene, Faith read about Hispanic youth and AsSu looked up at Timya while raising her hand behind her head. Timya stared forward, notably not making eye contact with AsSu (see Figure 3).



Figure 1: Activating Statistics Moment #1

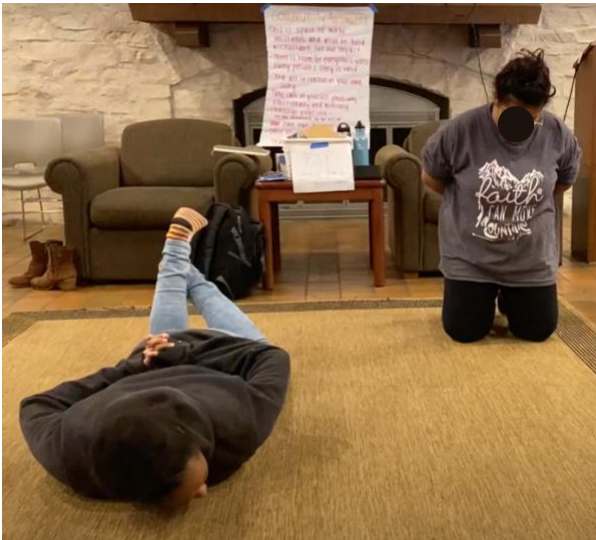


Figure 2: Activating Statistics Moment #2



Figure 3: Activating Statistics Moment #3

In my reflective log, I noted that I found this scene “profound,” as I tried to unpack my perception of the performers’ shifting levels of commitment. I reflected:

They had trouble committing, they had to do theirs three times before they really committed. But once they did, it was super awesome. Timya specifically, I noticed her having really good moments of just committing and acting to the moment. [pause] It was super awesome the truth, I think, that was expressed in the statistics that they created and shared. (Reflective Log, 30 October 2019)

In this fieldwork excerpt, I identify Timya’s commitment to her character through the subtle gestures and expressions that she embodied during the scene. I further reference the multiple attempts to perform the scene as evidence of an overall lack of commitment to the piece from the small group. However, when I look at the video of the three attempts to share this scene during rehearsal, I reach a different conclusion. In the first attempt, Confidence does not enter and point at the dice game at the top of the scene. Timya and AsSu visibly notice Confidence’s absence, but initially continue on with the scene. After a

few seconds, though, just as Confidence begins to enter much later than intended, Timya says “Wait, okay, wait.” and the scene (and video) stop. I remember the group taking a minute to review their blocking before their second attempt. In the video of attempt #2, the scene seemingly begins smoothly. It is not until the last move of the scene, when Timya and Confidence move toward AsSu and Faith begins to read about Hispanic youth that AsSu breaks character and sheepishly admits “I messed up.” The last few seconds of the video of this attempt capture the group honestly and playfully expressing their collective frustration at being so close to performing their scene without mistakes. In the video of the third and final attempt, the group moves through their performance without stopping and even holds their final tableaux for a beat, offering a satisfying conclusion to the scene. When viewed together, I realize that these three attempts demonstrate Timya, AsSu, and Confidence’s deep commitment to honoring the artistic vision of their performance. As I reflect on my initial reflection of this moment, I wonder how my assumptions about these youth shaped my easy dismissal of their commitment to the work. Did I expect Timya, AsSu, Confidence to “struggle” with commitment? What assumptions did I overlook about what commitment is and looks like? Why was I concerned with commitment in the first place?

In addition to raising questions about my own assumptions, my analysis of this moment from rehearsal also illuminates the role of performance and embodiment in the healing potential of “Activating Statistics” in PJP. I noted my impression of this performance action in my reflective log after rehearsal:

I feel like it's been maybe the most successful way, the most successful and the most accessible way in kind of breaking down, what does injustice actually look like in our real lives? And having numbers, which is something we're taught to trust, as opposed to embodied knowledge. Having numbers to prove those, how does that...not that it makes your embodied knowledge any...you're embodied knowledge is legitimate already, but how does seeing numbers in a way that

makes...how does seeing the numbers connected to that help you express or...or...embrace for yourself that your embodied truth is legitimate? (Reflective Log, 30 October 2019)

Though I struggle with eloquence, in this log entry I describe my experience and understanding of how working in and through the body opens possibilities for expanding how truth and knowledge is “legitimized.” In this reflection, I contrast the hard facts of positivist thinking (like numbers and statistics) with the importance of lived experience that is centered in feminist epistemology. I further position the body as an archive of this lived experience. Mia Perry and Carmen Medina examine how embodiment functions within performative pedagogy, asserting that “Bodies are perceived as inscribed and inscribing people’s relationships, engagement, and interpretation of multiple ways and histories of being, experiencing, and living, in the world” (63). In other words, working in our bodies brings learners individual/collective histories and experiences to the center of knowledge production and meaning-making. In this way, I realize that the healing power of “Activating Statistics” is not in how the statistics legitimize youth artists’ lived experience, but rather in how participants’ embodied truth legitimizes the statistics.

Approaching Performance: Resisting Urgency Thinking

The closer we got to the performance at the end of Week Nine, the more consistent and robust attendance at rehearsals became, as can be seen in Table 4. As we neared the performance, some youth artists even started requesting that they be allowed to miss other Resident Place activities in order to attend PJP rehearsals. However, it was still hard to predict who would be present on any given day, just as it had been throughout the whole process. Learning from our lack of communication with Resident Place in the summer, during the fall Faith and I regularly communicated and collaborated with Selena. In addition to attending most rehearsals, Selena would text Faith and me a couple hours before

with an estimate of how many and which participants would be present that day. While this attendance estimate gave Faith and me a general idea of what we might expect at rehearsal, more often than not young people would be added and/or removed from the participation list by the time rehearsal started.

Average Rehearsal Attendance	
Weeks One–Four	3-4 youth participants
Weeks Five–Seven	5-6 youth participants
Weeks Eight–Ten	7-8 youth participants

Table 4: PJP Attendance (Fall 2019)

This remained true, and increasingly challenging, throughout the two weeks leading up to the performance. For example, as we were driving to Rehearsal 11 at the beginning of Week Eight, Selena called Faith and I to ask if two new people could join the fall ensemble, Adrianna and Ciana. Adrianna had attended about three rehearsals at the beginning of the summer project, but we had not seen her since. Ciana, however, had not been a part of PJP at all before. Though Faith and I recognized it would be difficult to get new people up to speed at that point in the process, we fundamentally believe that as many people as possible should engage with PJP, so we welcomed Adrianna and Ciana into the ensemble. With the final performance less than two weeks away, we focused on folding Adrianna and Ciana into the existing (and evolving) script, neglecting to consider how we might support them in building their own performance and justice foundation. In this way, we prioritized the impending performance over Adrianna and Ciana’s experience of (re)defining their own identities within our shared social-political context. adrienne maree brown claims that such “urgency thinking” has contributed to stymied systems of

oppression and unsustainable movements of change as she argues that “our potential success lies in doing deep, slow, intentional work” (114). While the ever-changing composition of the youth ensemble made it difficult to guarantee a “deep, slow, intentional” process for everyone, I recognize that my desire for a “quality” final performance eventually overshadowed my attention to the project’s path toward individual and collective healing.

Initially, Faith and I intended to produce two performances during Week Nine, one at Resident Place and the other at UT. However, because we ended up having to cancel over a fifth of our planned rehearsals (4 out of 18), we lost a lot of time to work with the ensemble on the script. All blocking and rehearsing with the actual performance material happened during the performance week. As we got closer, Faith and I began to reframe the first performance at Resident Place as an “invited dress rehearsal” because it would be the first time the ensemble performed the whole script in order, and the first time some people performed certain sections at all. Although we invited the Resident Place community and a few colleagues to this sharing, the script was still incomplete. We added perhaps the most profound piece of the performance, the “Justice Poem,” after the dress rehearsal at Resident Place. The dress rehearsal was also the first time some of the youth artists had ever performed in front of an audience. Many participants expressed that the Resident Place sharing felt a bit messy and they hoped to do “better” in the final performance. In this way, the presentation at UT emerged as the primary performance.

Rehearsing Toward Healing Centered Engagement in PJP

As with the design phase, my analysis of the rehearsal process reveals how the systems and structures at Resident Place shaped the healing potential of PJP. Just as Faith and I navigated frequent changes to rehearsal logistics and participant attendance, the youth

artists employed their navigational capital as they advocated for themselves to attend PJP amidst other Resident Place responsibilities. In this way, I see that the “wispy” nature of our ensemble contributed to a healing possibility by encouraging both the adults and youth involved to build and utilize navigational capital. Throughout the rehearsal process, I also believed the changing and unpredictable reality of our wispy ensemble impeded Faith’s and my ability to fully center youth assets and interests. Ginwright advocates that “healing centered engagement is based in collective strengths and possibility” (“The Future”). With this, Ginwright positions youth (and adults) not only as active agents in their own healing journey, but also as the cartographers of their shared path toward healing. Though Faith and I worked to center the youth artists assets and ideas within each rehearsal, the overall structure of the devising process and development of the final performance was primarily guided by our own (adult) interests and visions. I initially thought that adult-led script development was evidence that Faith and I struggled to effectively learn and nurture the collective strengths and possibilities of the ensemble. However, with more reflection and critical conversations, I realize how I was holding a narrow view of what it looks like to utilize and cultivate youth assets. In shifting my focus away from the deficits of time and ensemble continuity, I recognize that by taking the lead on script development Faith and I employed our own assets as theatre artists, while making more space in rehearsal for youth artists to build performance skills and ensemble relationships with each other. In this way, I see how our wispy rehearsal process supported both the young people and adults in exercising and growing our diverse strengths while collaborating toward a shared vision of justice.

PHASE THREE: PERFORMANCE OF *OUR VOICE: IMAGINING A NEW WORLD*

In this section, I analyze the performance script and video recording of the performance and the post-performance reflection with the audience. I offer a detailed description of the live performance, from beginning to end, and highlight specific moments that exhibit HCE in action. A full version of the ensemble's final script, *Our Voice: Imagining a New World* can be found in Appendix A. I also examine a few key youth reflections from the post-performance discussion. I conclude this section with a brief discussion of how healing centered engagement appeared in the final PJP performance at UT on Friday, November 22, 2019.

Setting the Stage

On the day of the performance, the ensemble arrived at UT around 4p to rehearse the full script all together for the first time. Confidence, AsSu, North Baby, Adrianna, Ciana, Star, Cookie, and AsSu were all in attendance. The performance took place in a classroom at UT that converts into a small black box space. While the ensemble rehearsed, Becca Drew, built a visual world and ambiance for the performance. Becca Drew had created projection slides, wall hangings, and minimalistic lighting choices that reflected the ensemble's interest in a futuristic and other worldly design that used pink, purple, and blue hues (see Figure 4). After two hours of especially focused rehearsal, the ensemble took a break to enjoy pizza and relax before the 7p curtain.



Figure 4: Our Voice: Imagining a New World Opening Stage Picture

As the audience, arrived, PJP sound designer Jada Cadena filled the performance space with her (mostly) live sound design using a portable speaker. The audience was made up of approximately 35 people, some friends, family, and colleagues whom Faith and I had invited, and some who had been invited by Resident Place participants/staff. The audience size exceeded our expectations, so we had to add more chairs and thus started the performance about fifteen minutes late.

The performance began with a land acknowledgement, which is a statement that honors the unique and lasting relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their historic territories. The US Department of Arts and Culture’s *Honor Native Land* guide observes that although a land acknowledgment “can be an opening to greater public consciousness of Native sovereignty and cultural rights” on its own an acknowledgment is a “small gesture” that “becomes meaningful when coupled with authentic relationships and informed action” (3). Faith and I were further reminded of the limitations of land

acknowledgements when at our first rehearsal Selena shared that many Indigenous Peoples critique land acknowledgements as words devoid of real action, undercut by the continued state occupation of Native land. While we believed a public land acknowledgement was important to include in the performance, Faith and I realized that we did not have enough time in rehearsal to explore and create an acknowledgement in a meaningful and responsible way with the full ensemble. We therefore decided to write the land acknowledgement ourselves and invited both Selena and Confidence, who often shared about their Native identities, to contribute and perform with us. Faith's and my process of developing the land acknowledgement involved both of us reflecting on our ancestral histories and legacies as we each worked to identify our personal relationship to colonization in the US. We thereby practiced the restoration of our identities in support of our own healing (Ginwright "The Future"). While I found the experience of re(writing) the land acknowledgement with Faith profoundly meaningful in my own growth, I wish we had had the time to include the rest of the ensemble in the process. The land acknowledgement was the only part of the performance that included adult performers and that was not developed directly from the youth artists' words and ideas.

After the land acknowledgement, AsSu, Confidence, and North Baby introduced PJP and the performance, reading somewhat robotically directly from their scripts. AV and Ciana then led the audience in "Two by three by Bradford." We originally structured this opening ritual so that audience members worked with other audience members and ensemble members worked with other ensemble members. During rehearsal earlier in the week, though, AsSu insisted that PJP participants should partner with a person from the audience in "Bradford" so the ensemble could support people in learning the process. Although Faith and I encouraged AsSu's idea, when it came to the performance most of the ensemble stayed in the stage area and worked with each other. However, AsSu

committed to teaching the audience the game and asked a couple of different people if they wanted to work with her before finding an audience partner. AsSu then clarified the directions of “Bradford” for her partner and offered the first gesture by raising her left fist in the air and saying “justice.” While working with this audience member, AsSu also encouraged specificity of gestures through experimentation and repetition. In this way, AsSu demonstrated her “individual power” within “activist art” (Ginwright *Hope* 35), as well as her commitment to both justice and performance.

Making the Personal Political (in Public)

Following the opening sequence, the ensemble shared the first of the series of Activated Statistics that were woven throughout the performance. After “Statistic #1” the performers moved into “Truth About Me,” during which the full ensemble stood in an arc onstage and established a collective clapping and stomping rhythm. One at a time, each performer stepped forward and shared their name and a truth about themselves. When it was AsSu’s turn, she stepped forward and said, “The truth about me is I’m in foster care.” This truth stood out as it was a change from previous rehearsals including the dress rehearsal at Resident Place where AsSu had said “The truth about me is I’m from Houston.” Though the label “foster care” is often prescribed to youth by systems, institutions, and adults, in this moment AsSu named and claimed her position within the foster care system for herself, thereby engaging in the healing practice of restoring identity. By publicly performing her identity position, AsSu further acknowledged her understanding of the systems and institutions, or politics, that shape her life.

As the performance continued through the second activated statistic and into two collective poems, “Being a Woman Means” and “Letter to a Woman in the Future,” the ensemble seemed to get into the flow of the piece. They continued to help each other when

someone forgot something or got lost, demonstrating “care” and “the meaning of ensemble” as one audience member noted during the post-performance reflection (Post-Performance Reflection Transcript). This ensemble care extended through the third statistic and into “What is Race? What is Ethnicity?” In this section, the ensemble entered the stage one at a time to perform unique repetitive motions that built upon each other to create a collective “machine” to represent participants’ experiences with race and ethnicity. While the ensemble performed their machine onstage, Jada played a voiceover that she created from audio recordings of participants defining race and/or ethnicity in their own words. Below is an excerpt from the transcription of the voiceover:

An ethnic conflict is a conflict between two or more contending ethnic groups. The conflict may be a political, social, or economic fight within society.

Because of race, there is systemic discrimination against African American people. Period.

Ethnicity is heritage and where you come from.

Race is culture. Race is color.

Global ethnic wars are not purifying anything, they’re tainting humanity.

My race doesn’t impact my color or my personality. (“What is Race? What is Ethnicity?” Voiceover Transcription)

These definitions express a multi-faceted understanding of race and ethnicity that is both “historically grounded and contemporarily relevant” (Ginwright “The Future”). When combined together, youth artists’ individual definitions demonstrate collective meaning through which the ensemble “[discovers] our purpose and [builds] an awareness of our role in advancing justice” (Ginwright *Hope* 26). In this way, the ensemble voiceover identifies how race and ethnicity intersect with power to create injustice in society while (re)claiming and (re)imagining the ensemble’s own experiences with race and ethnicity. This section of

the performance thus centered healing through a reclamation of identity and focus on well-being.

From the “What is Race? What is Ethnicity”⁹ section, the ensemble transitioned into sharing their “Six Word Stories about Race”¹⁰ which they each accompanied with a gesture. Another change from the dress rehearsal occurred during the six-word stories. Before the sharing at Resident Place, North Baby asked if his six-word story could be “Did drugs, but still a good man.” Faith and I did not personally have an issue with this story, but we were worried about possible institutional rules and subsequent consequences for North Baby. We asked him to check with Selena, who similarly did not mind North Baby’s story but also did not want him to get into trouble for anything he shared while performing. Because Selena was not sure which, if any, Resident Place staff leadership would be attending, she suggested North Baby revise his story for the dress rehearsal to omit reference to drugs. So, at the Resident Place sharing, North Baby said, “Made mistakes, but still a good man.” However, Selena, Faith, and I all encouraged North Baby to perform whatever six-word story he wanted during the performance at UT. I was excited and impressed when North Baby chose to share his original story with the audience. Similar to AsSu in “Truth About Me,” North Baby embodied healing-centered engagement with his six-word story by claiming his past experiences while naming his identity and assets as a “good” person within a public context.

Envisioning Together

After the six-word stories and the final statistic, the performance continued into the “Justice Poem,” a choral performance that involved the full ensemble. This culminating

⁹ Adapted from “Defining Race and Ethnicity” performance action (Alrutz and Hoare 137).

¹⁰ Adapted from “Six-Word Stories About Race” performance action (Alrutz and Hoare 140).

poem grew out of multiple performance actions from both the summer pilot and fall project. Because of our limited rehearsal time as we approached the performance, I had to combine various pieces of ensemble-generated content into the final poem outside of rehearsal. Though the full ensemble was not involved in the composition of the full poem, all of the poem's language came directly from the ensemble and centered on questions raised throughout the project like: What do you believe? What do you hope for? What does justice for us mean? Much like the race and ethnicity voiceover, the "Justice Poem" expressed collective meaning while further centering individual and collective agency in creating justice. In constructing this poem, I responded to the ensemble's cultural and political reality through healing action by envisioning a future that centers youth strengths, values, and expressions of collective well-being. By performing this poem for an audience, youth artists embodied my vision of healing justice in action, and I hope experienced their own healing in the process.

In the final movement of the performance, the audience witnessed a moment of ensemble connection during "My Hope for the Future," when each performer shared a personal hope with their collaborators. The ensemble then invited the audience to join them in their closing ritual, "I have a voice," thereby positioning the audience as necessary agents in the journey toward justice. To conclude the performance, Faith and I returned to the stage to engage the audience and youth artists in a brief reflection. After first asking the audience to share their initial responses to the ensemble's performance, we then invited audience members to ask the youth artists questions which offered an opportunity for the ensemble to describe the impact of PJP in their own words. For example, when asked "How does it feel to perform?" North Baby responded:

I just want to say, like, it feels powerful to say like what is being known for. Like we're actually being heard. And like for you all coming here and us playing and

acting out for you all. Y'all actually can say something. And being heard, like, I don't know how to explain this, but yeah. It just feels great. (Post-Performance Reflection Transcription)

With this, North Baby explicitly named his feeling of empowerment through performance while also calling on those in the audience (and ensemble) who “actually can say something” to continue to listen and be heard in the world. North Baby’s insight aligns with Ginwright’s description of how achievement supports healing by “[illuminating] life’s possibilities and [acknowledging] movement toward explicit goals” (*Hope* 26). In this way, North Baby simultaneously expressed his pride in the ensemble’s work as well as the potential for that work to inspire further action.

Similarly, Confidence named her power, or achievement, in the following response to “What kept you coming back to PJP?”

I have done this for a while. Yeah, and I was really nervous to do this because it was a really big thing. And I was like really nervous. My hands are sweating. I was so nervous. But I really wanted like, to think about like race, ethnicity, and stuff like that. And knowing about yourself and everyone. And about like your voice is powerful and you can change the world. And like other things. And like for me, it's just like that I am a Native American. And learning about that, I never really learned much about it because I never been around my people before, much. So, I'm just like really glad that I get to join this Performing Justice. So, I can learn more about it. And I want to perform for the project, so. I want to keep doing it. (Post-Performance Reflection Transcription)

In this reflection, Confidence described that despite her performance nerves, she committed to PJP because of her desire to learn about herself, her culture, other people, and how “your voice” can “change the world.” As I consider Confidence’s response through a healing centered lens, I recognize what therapist and trauma specialist Resmaa Menakem’s calls “clean pain.” Menakem argues that in order to heal the racialized trauma that lives in the bodies of those who live in the US, we must all move through pain. Menakem distinguishes between “clean pain” and “dirty pain,” emphasizing the value of the former and harm of the latter. He describes clean pain as the uncomfortable experience of knowing or not

knowing what to do, not wanting or being scared to do it, and doing it anyway (Menakem 19). Dirty pain, on the other hand, “is the pain of avoidance, blame, and denial” (Menakem 20). Building on Menakem’s definition, I understand clean pain to be the discomfort (e.g. sweaty palms, dry mouth, knots in the stomach, etc.) a person experiences when they confront their own/others’ assumptions and/or engage despite fear of the unknown. From this, I observe that Confidence offers examples of clean pain by noting her “sweating” hands and mentioning three times how nervous she was to perform. In spite of this discomfort and fear, Confidence performed with PJP to share with the audience her identity and Native American culture, boldly claiming her power to effect change in the world. In this way, I observe that Confidence moved through clean pain in order to engage in a healing centered performance process grounded in identity, culture, and the potential for individuals to contribute to collective well-being, or “perform justice.”

After about twenty minutes of reflection with the audience, Faith and I ended the performance by leading one last round of applause for the ensemble. The youth artists then took over the stage for an enthusiastic dance party. Their excitement and pride were unmistakable in their beaming faces, unfiltered compliments, and robust laughter that filled the room with warmth and gratitude. The joy and celebration that the ensemble embodied with this dance party was further reflected in the warm exchange amongst the audience, who leisurely chatted and snacked before leaving, many people stopping first to share their positive experience of the performance with Faith and me.

Performing Toward Healing Centered Engagement in PJP

Through my analysis of the performance of *Our Voice: Imagining a New World*, I notice that the wispy nature of the PJP ensemble impacted the healing possibilities of the rehearsal process and final performance in connected ways. During rehearsal, the changing

and unpredictable composition of the ensemble presented some challenges in developing a youth-driven experience that fostered and sustained well-being. When examining the final performance, however, I see that because of our necessarily open and wispy rehearsal process the ensemble developed flexible and adaptive *assets* that opened the door for performers like AsSu and North Baby to make decisions in the moment to deviate from the script in order to more fully claim their individual identity and vision. Like the performance actions in rehearsal, then, the final performance became a place for youth artists to consider, question, and express identity through embodiment within a public context.

Ginwright reminds us that “Healing centered engagement is the result of building a healthy identity, and a sense of belonging” (Ginwright "The Future"). In other words, a possibility for healing comes from situating personal understanding of identity within shared community and culture. My analysis further reveals that the embodiment of individual identity that emerged in performance actions contributed to a shared ensemble culture that was expressed through and within *Our Voice*. Throughout rehearsals the PJP ensemble used embodiment, storytelling, and collaboration to explore their own cultures specifically in regard to race, ethnicity, gender, and attraction. In turn, this ensemble-based approach cultivated a way of working and being that was unique to this community of artists. This PJP “ensemble culture” honored embodied knowledge and centered performance as an act of justice. During the final performance, the ensemble then shared their ensemble culture through an embodied call to action that expressed individual voice, community care, and shared vision. As artists Chloe Johnston and Coya Paz Brownrigg point out, the development of a group-specific culture is indicative of ensemble devising processes that rely on “collective vision” and “figuring out what works best *this* time, with *these* particular people” (x). Johnston and Brownrigg advocate that

“[Ensemble process] happens in the spaces between people, it responds to the space, it responds to the world outside the space because the people in the room can’t help but bring it in. It models a world where people are valued equally and welcomed as they are, for what they are able to give. (Johnston and Brownrigg, x).

With this, Johnston and Brownrigg emphasize how ensemble process draws on individual assets to develop a shared sense of belonging within the performance space that also exists in a broader political context. In this way, the final PJP performance centered healing by offering opportunities for individual performers to claim and embody their identity (e.g. “Activating Statistics,” “Truth About Me,” “Six Word Stories About Race”), while also reflecting a shared ensemble culture (e.g. “Being a Woman Means,” “What is Race? What is Ethnicity?”) and vision for collective well-being (e.g. “Letter to a Woman in the Future,” “Justice Poem,” “My Hope for the Future”).

CONCLUSION: HEALING CENTERED ENGAGEMENT ACROSS THE PERFORMING JUSTICE PROJECT

In this chapter, I provided a detailed analysis of the design, rehearsal, and performance of PJP at Resident Place because I wanted to find out how a youth-centered devising process creates opportunities for healing, in order to understand as a teaching artist how a rigorous aesthetic practice might forge a healing path toward justice. Using Shawn Ginwright’s healing centered engagement framework, I considered how this applied theatre project was/was not explicitly political, culturally grounded in the restoration of identity, asset driven and focused on well-being, and supportive of adult providers. Through this analysis, I discovered that PJP embraces HCE by inviting teaching artists and other adult stakeholders to work alongside young people while navigating complex systems to make change. Though PJP supported the ensemble in developing navigational capital, at times the various structures, policies, and schedules at Resident Place prevented youth participants from attending rehearsals. For this reason, I came to understand our PJP

ensemble to be “wispy,” unpredictable and ever-changing. During the rehearsal process, this wispy community made it difficult to center youth assets and choices, therefore the personal identities and interests of the adult PJP teaching artists (i.e. Faith and me) profoundly shaped the ensemble’s shared journey toward collective well-being. This discovery invites me to further consider how my own embodied identity and assumptions impact my work as a teaching artist and youth worker. Finally, I discovered that through performance aesthetics, or theatrical devices/concepts like embodiment and ensemble that artists use to express meaning and deepen collaboration within devising, PJP centers healing by acknowledging individual identity and experience within a collective and collaborative process. Thus, the PJP devising process resulted not only in an original performance piece, but also in a unique ensemble culture that was then embodied and materialized in the aesthetics of the final performance.

With fresh insight into how applied theatre with youth can support healing, I turn to my last research question: What is the relationship between aesthetics and healing within a performance-building process with youth? As I move into the final chapter of this thesis document, I expand on my learning about the aesthetics of healing mentioned in this chapter and make recommendations for centering individual and collective healing when devising with young people.

Chapter Three

The role of the artist is to make revolution irresistible.

—Toni Cade Bambara

When I started this research study, I set out to explore the intersection between healing and aesthetics in applied drama/theatre, hoping to identify for myself an “aesthetics of healing” that I might adopt when working with youth artists. As a part of my analysis process, I coded my reflective logs for emergent aesthetic attributes and noted connections between those aesthetic themes and the key findings about healing centered engagement that I outlined in Chapter Two. I planned to write a second analysis chapter which would discuss in depth the relationship between aesthetics and healing in PJP at Resident Place that my analysis revealed. Then the coronavirus pandemic hit the global stage, and everything changed. Along with the rest of the world, my day-to-day activities have drastically shifted in the last month as I have had to discover new ways of working, creating, and living. The vulnerable, challenging, uncertain task of writing this document suddenly became nearly insurmountable amidst the overwhelming sea of uncertainty in the world. After a decent amount of panicking, as well as invaluable guidance and patience from mentors and loved ones, I eventually came to realize that in order to find my own healing path through this time I had to let go of what I thought this thesis paper had to be. I had to give myself permission to do less, so I could care (and take care) more.

During my process of centering my own care while finishing this study, I have also been thinking about the young people at Resident Place a lot. Like many people, I have been experiencing intense waves of loneliness, despair, and anxiety as a result of being confined to my small apartment where I live alone. I realize that the lack of control, sense of isolation, and uncertainty about the future that I feel pressing on me because of this global health crisis may parallel what the young people’s lives might be like at Resident

Place on a daily basis. While I can still take mask-clad walks around my neighborhood, youth at Resident Place are never allowed to leave the gated campus without permission and supervision, even during non-pandemic times. As I have had to negotiate my own relationship to this thesis project amidst the current climate, I have wondered about how we prioritize arts-based justice work like PJP when both personal and social life is constricted, unstable, and draining. How might we nurture **irresistible revolution** in spaces and times when everyday life is already challenging, exhausting, and unpredictable?

To that end, in this third and final chapter, I employ aesthetics as a lens for considering recommendations for future practice-based research on the healing potential of performance processes. I begin with an overview of the “Aesthetic Perspectives” *framework* from Americans for the Arts, which offers innovative language and critical questions for understanding and evaluating aesthetics in arts for change work. I then offer recommendations for the field in regard to how healing centered devising projects with youth might intentionally cultivate three aesthetic attributes from “Aesthetic Perspectives” that emerged throughout my analysis as especially impactful in PJP: commitment, openness, and disruption. I follow this with the limitations of this study and closing thoughts.

(RE)DEFINING AESTHETICS IN ARTS FOR CHANGE

Conceptual understanding and critical evaluation of aesthetics is widely debated across artistic practices, theories, and contexts. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines “aesthetic” as “a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, and taste and with the creation and appreciation of beauty” (“Aesthetics”). Broadly speaking then, aesthetics are the ideas, values, and assumptions that inform artistic engagement and assessment. But what do “quality” aesthetics look like in applied drama and theatre? How

do we assess the value and impact of aesthetic choices? How are ideas about aesthetics shaped by the same systems of power and control that ADT often seeks to change?

Historically, dominant notions of aesthetics have focused on defining and evaluating art in relation to Euro-centric standards of beauty. As Nicole Gurgel of the arts activism collective Alternate ROOTS observes, “the term [aesthetics] emerges from European philosophy, and as such, brings with it a history of hierarchy and domination” (web). Thus, mainstream aesthetic language and evaluative processes perpetuate a legacy of artistic criticism that privileges colonial ethnocentrism and ignores non-dominant cultural practices and standards. In an effort to reclaim the concept of aesthetics, Alternate ROOTS spent 2014 engaging in a year-long reflective initiative focused on dismantling and reimagining oppressive aesthetic discourses. Out of that collective envisioning emerged the following definition of aesthetics, first articulated by Bob Leonard:

Aesthetics is an inquiry into how artists, in their products and processes, utilize sensory and emotional stimulation and experience to find and express meaning and orientation in the world and to deepen relationships amongst artists and their partners across differences. (qtd in Kidd)

With this, Alternate ROOTS emphasizes that aesthetics are the ways in which artists engage with senses, emotions, and experiences in order to make meaning in the world. This definition centers the human element of artistic practices, highlighting how aesthetics are a means for developing relationships and connecting amongst difference. Furthermore, by framing aesthetics as “an inquiry,” Alternate ROOTS invites us to consider how aesthetic conversations cultivate curiosity about the expansive potential for creating meaning and connection in the world. In this way, understandings of aesthetics are flexible and varied, rather than fixed or definite.

Following the path laid by artists like those at Alternate ROOTS, in 2017 Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, published “Aesthetic

Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change,” a framework to deepen understanding and assessment of creative work at the intersection of arts and “civic engagement, community development, and justice” (“Aesthetic Perspectives”). This framework outlines eleven “aesthetic attributes,” of creative practices, processes, and products aimed toward progressive change. With these attributes, which include both aesthetic qualities and values, Animating Democracy seeks:

1. To emphasize the *integral role* of the aesthetic in civically and socially engaged art; and
2. To offer a set of criteria that supports full understanding of Arts for Change work *as art*.

(Borstel et al 6; emphasis added)

In this way, *Aesthetic Perspectives* (re)centers the vital role of *art* in arts for change, while simultaneously expanding common beliefs about what is *considered* aesthetic. In collaboration with ethical “practice-based values” the aesthetic attributes provide “a rich set of criteria for what constitutes rigor” in arts for change work (Borstel et al 9). The framework further insists that “the attributes are not meant to codify or to limit,” (Borstel et al 11) but rather to inspire continued development, discussion, and evaluation of arts for change work. These eleven attributes are: commitment, communal meaning, disruption, cultural integrity, emotional experience, sensory experience, risk-taking, openness, resourcefulness, coherence, and stickiness (Borstel et al 10).

EMERGING AESTHETIC ATTRIBUTES IN PJP

As I analyzed PJP at Resident Place using the *Aesthetic Perspectives* framework, I found that commitment, openness, and disruption emerged as key aesthetic attributes which shaped the ensemble experience throughout rehearsals and performance. I therefore offer my final arguments and future recommendations about healing centered engagement

within a performance-building process with youth, framed through the aesthetics of commitment, openness, and disruption.

Commitment

Aesthetic Perspectives understand an arts for change project to demonstrate commitment when “Creative processes and products embody conviction to the cause espoused through the work” (Borstel et al 15). In other words, commitment is exhibited by a strong belief and investment in the artistic and/or social goals of a project. As an aesthetic attribute, commitment extends beyond the artmaking and sharing process to inspire “rigor, consistency, and sustained dedication” that expands past “the qualities of passion and aspiration” (Borstel et al 15). Commitment, then, is not simply about practicing accountability to an artistic process, but also about how a creative project nurtures a personal and/or shared responsibility to a cause that stretches beyond the project itself.

In PJP, the commitment of the ensemble, to both the performance and justice goals of the project, grew gradually throughout the process. Because the young people were not in full control of their schedules at Resident Place, it was difficult for youth artists to practice commonly recognized traits of commitment, like consistent attendance at rehearsal, especially at the beginning of the process. However, as the project developed, the ensemble increasingly exhibited commitment to the creative visions(s) of their devised performance pieces, as exemplified by Timya, AsSu, and Confidence in the Activating Statistics rehearsal snapshot I offered in Chapter Two. As we got closer to the final performance, attendance also became more consistent, in part because youth artists advocated for themselves to be available for rehearsal. For example, during the performance week AsSu chose to skip equine therapy (a widely relished opportunity) in order to attend our only rehearsal at UT before the performance. In this way, AsSu and

other youth artists used their navigational capital to build their commitment to PJP, in the same way that Selena, Faith, and I used our own navigational capital to foster commitment to PJP within our different institutions (i.e. Resident Place and UT, respectively). Furthermore, throughout both the performance and post-performance reflection, the ensemble expressed sustained commitment to the multi-faceted aims of PJP. Confidence, for instance, shared during the reflection her desire to “keep doing [PJP]” because she wanted to learn about race, ethnicity, and “knowing about yourself” (Post-Performance Reflection Transcription).

Openness

In arts for change, openness exists when a “creative work deepens impact by remaining open, fluid, transparent, subject to influence, and able to hold contradiction” (Borstel et al 29). Openness is the way in which a project is accessible and responsive to participant interests and needs, while also embracing nuance and ambiguity throughout exploration and discussion. Within *Aesthetic Perspectives*, artists practice openness by inviting “fluidity in and between process and product, allowing the creative work to change based on stakeholder exchange and input” (Borstel et al 29). In this way, openness as an aesthetic attribute promotes the artistic possibility of revision and variation, as well as the ongoing and adaptive nature of sustaining change work.

Openness emerged during PJP in part out of necessity. Because consistent rehearsal attendance was nearly impossible to guarantee, Faith and I realized early on that we would need to keep rehearsals open to newcomers in order to develop individual interest that might eventually evolve into ensemble commitment. This open rehearsal policy meant that youth artists entered (and left) our PJP process at different points, which in turn challenged the efficacy of our intentionally designed project structure that aimed to build connections

and deepen understanding across scaffolded rehearsals. During rehearsals, conversations that Faith and I intended to be quick reviews of previously covered material, often morphed into significant (re)introduction of concepts. At times, I worried that these “repeated” topics and discussions might be a waste of time because they kept us from “moving forward.” However, after a particularly nuanced conversation about race and ethnicity in Rehearsal #11, I noted in my reflective log that “coming back to these conversations is so much of the work” (Reflective Log, 12 November 2019). In this way, the openness of our rehearsal process reflected brown’s ideas about the ongoing, iterative nature of making and remaking the pathway to justice (103). The openness of the rehearsal process grew into an open performance script that remained fluid all the way through the final performance. In this way, the ensemble embodied openness during the performance by embracing unrehearsed opportunities to claim individual identity and personal assets, as AsSu did in “Truth About Me” and North Baby in his six-word story. The performance further expressed nuanced, and at times contradictory, perspectives on racial and gender (in)justice, as evidenced by the “What is Race? What is Ethnicity” voiceover that I analyzed in Chapter Two.

Disruption

Art is disruptive when it “challenges what is by exposing what has been hidden, posing new ways of being, and modeling new forms of action” (Borstel et al 19). Put another way, disruption relates to how the form and content of creative work centers stories and practices that have been ignored or erased, challenges the status quo, and imagines change in action. *Aesthetic Perspectives* suggest that disruption “can propose positive alternatives to dysfunctional conditions and coexist in a meaningful way with constructive stability and continuity” (Borstel et al 19). Disruption seeks to interrupt harmful

environments and policies in order to strengthen and maintain positive practices and relationships.

The overall PJP program structure creates disruption not only by working to uncover and resist white supremacy and patriarchy, but also by centering young people in the journey toward racial and gender justice. My analysis further revealed that as a performative pedagogy, PJP disrupts what feminist pedagogues like bell hooks call “the mind/body split,” which considers cognitive learning as separate and superior to embodied knowledge (hooks 193). By using performance to explore (in)justice, PJP engages participants as “whole” rather than “disembodied spirits” (hooks 193), while simultaneously recognizing that trauma, and therefore healing, happen in and through the body (Menakem 7). Although Faith and I identified our goal to “push and center” the development of performance skills in PJP (Meeting Notes, 29 August 2019), we often failed to disrupt the mind/body split as we struggled in rehearsals to avoid what I dubbed the “discussion vortex.” Especially during the first part of the process, as an ensemble we would get stuck discussing justice concepts, instead of exploring them through performance. As we began to take more time for embodied performance actions in rehearsal, I noticed the ensemble’s understanding of and connection to the justice content seemed to deepen, like in the Activating Statistics example from Chapter Two. Performance also became a vehicle for disruption in the final sharing of *Our Voice* at UT, as an adult audience focused their attention on a youth ensemble candidly expressing their experiences, opinions, and ideas about race, gender, power, and justice. During the performance, the youth artists embraced opportunities to disrupt dominant narratives about young people. For example, with his six-word story, “Did drugs, still a good man,” North Baby publicly questioned powerful notions of what it means to be “good,” in turn encouraging the audience to do the same. While reflecting after the performance, the

ensemble further noted how “being heard” by adults broke the norm (Post-Performance Reflection Transcription). AsSu summed up this disorienting disruption perfectly when she shared during our final reflective rehearsal that no adults had ever talked with her about justice before PJP, so she was confused when Faith and I first started asking the ensemble about (in)justice, because “I was like why do you care?” (Rehearsal Transcription 26 November 2019).

RECOMMENDATIONS

To work towards an aesthetic of healing (see Figure 5) in PJP and other performance-building processes with youth, members of the ensemble should build shared commitment to developing performance skills (or assets) in order to explore and restore embodied identity and expression. Teaching artists can help nurture an equal dedication to performance and justice by intentionally scaffolding exploration of individual identity and shared culture within performance skills development, trusting that performance progress will feed identity and systems understanding, and vice versa. Commitment must be earned and should not be assumed nor expected, thus considerable time and care is necessary during rehearsal to allow individuals to find their own performance paths toward justice. Because every person is on a unique aesthetic/healing journey, a radical commitment to openness throughout rehearsal and performance is critical to establishing mutual commitment to performance and justice. Especially when working in wispy communities, I advocate for ensembles to foster a flexible, adaptive, iterative rehearsal culture that reflects the ongoing, repetitive nature of (re)claiming identity and making change. Rather than accepting openness as a necessary response to inconsistent participant attendance and engagement, I wonder how a project might intentionally center openness throughout both process and product. How could we deliberately design each PJP rehearsal to consider

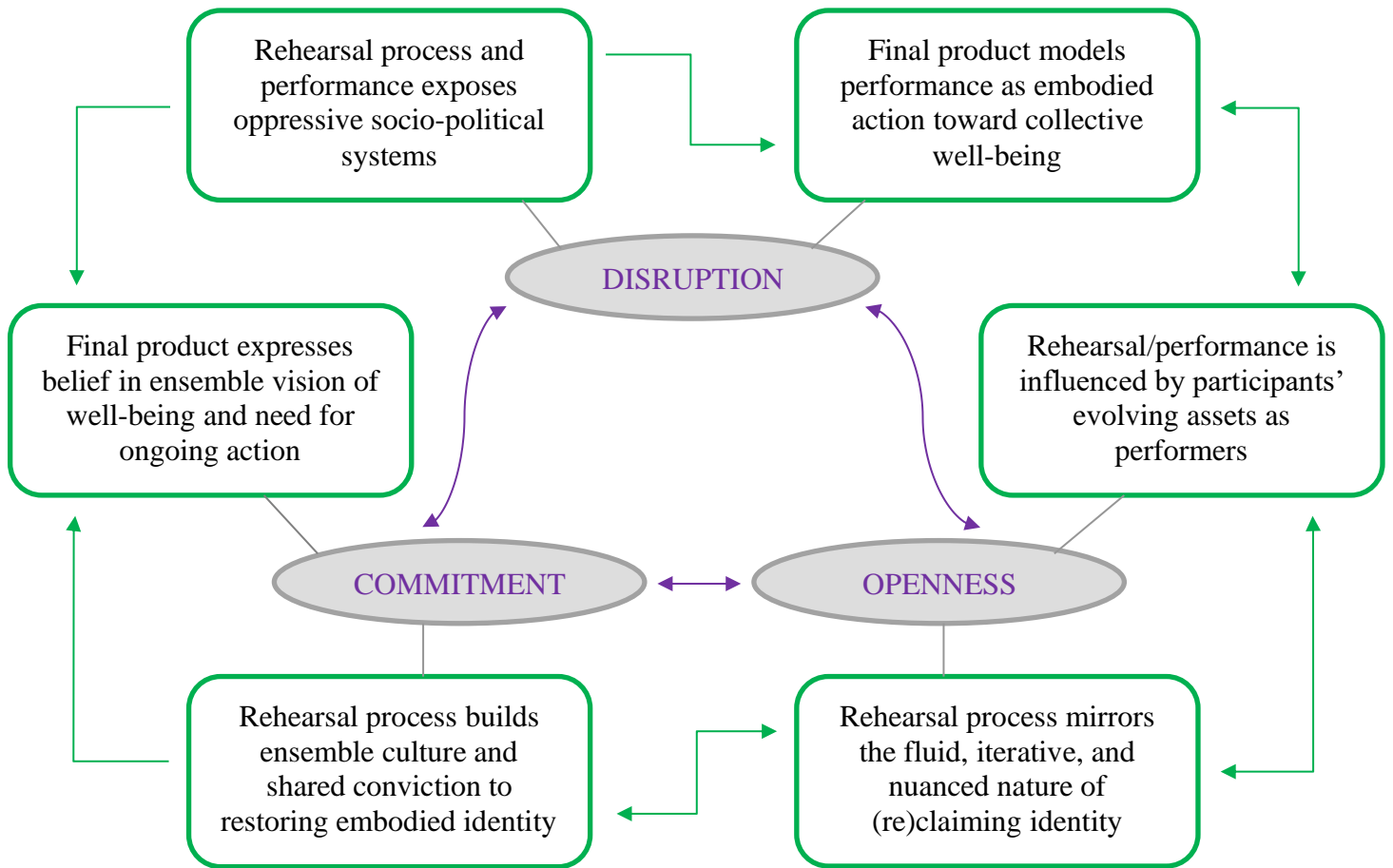


Figure 5: Relationship between aesthetics and healing in applied drama/theatre with youth

multiple points of access so that youth artists could gracefully enter (or exit) the project at any time?

Lastly, I call for a (re)emphasis on disrupting hegemonic discourses about youth by centering young people’s voices, assets, and choices in performance. As systems of power, white supremacy and patriarchy intersect with the social construction of “youth” to maintain racialized, gendered, and protectionist policies that impact young people’s lives.

Performance processes provide a unique opportunity for youth artists to consider their own lived and embodied experience with (in)justice while collaborating across difference to imagine and pursue collective well-being. Producing a performance by a youth ensemble for an adult audience further disrupts traditional ideas of who should be heard in public, thereby (re)framing youth performance as a healing act of justice.

LIMITATIONS

As I've discussed throughout this paper, both healing and aesthetics are experienced collectively. Yet, an individual person's understanding of healing and aesthetics is uniquely personal, rooted in identity, culture, and self-efficacy. Though I intended for this study to examine the full ensemble's experience with healing and aesthetics, I chose to use a reflective practitioner methodology which grounded analysis in my reflective log, therefore focusing on my own experiences and insights. The analysis and discussion of the aesthetics of healing that I put forth in this document are unavoidably filtered through my unique perspective and positionality (e.g. white, female, cisgender, graduate student, etc.). While I believe a reflective/reflexive practice is critical in applied drama/theatre facilitation, I recognize that I missed an opportunity to hear directly from youth participants, as well as Faith and Selena, about their experiences with healing and/or aesthetics. I wonder what I might have learned, for example, had I conducted post-project interviews or collected participant journals/surveys. How might this study have shifted had I positioned youth artists as co-researchers of healing aesthetics within a participatory action research model? As I continue to study and practice applied drama/theatre, I am eager to consider how I might more intentionally incorporate youth voice/perspective within research design and scholarship.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In this practice-based study I examined a performance-building process intended to cultivate a healing aesthetic in order to engage youth artists in exploring, envisioning, and enacting racial and gender justice. Through my data analysis, I identified how aesthetically grounded opportunities for healing emerged throughout the ensemble's experience in the project, revealing the potential for an "aesthetics of healing" in applied/drama theatre with youth that centers commitment, openness, and disruption (see Figure 5). By illustrating the relationship between healing and aesthetics, I hope that more ADT artists will intentionally employ a healing-centered, aesthetically rigorous approach to their work with young people. I argue for aesthetics to be recognized as a significant means for individual and collective change-making and hope that more teaching artists engage aesthetic perspectives as an underpinning to their projects. With this process I began to reframe changing and unpredictable participant attendance/engagement, or "wispy communities," as assets in cultivating an ensemble commitment to openness, rather than as an unfortunate obstacle to work around. I leave this project with a renewed commitment to center youth voice and choice throughout the design, rehearsal, and performance of devising processes like the Performing Justice Project. To that end, I conclude this paper by sharing an excerpt from the ensemble's collaboratively devised "Justice Poem," which answers (and asks) the question: How will *you* perform justice?

*By being myself,
showing up,
and being seen and heard
I perform justice
and change the world.
When I use my voice,
my trials,
my future choices
To stop all violence*

*I perform justice
and change the world*

*When we,
smart and intelligent people,
build others up to their potential
we perform justice
and change the world. (Our Voice: Imagining a New World final script)*

Appendices

APPENDIX A: *OUR VOICE: IMAGINING A NEW WORLD SCRIPT*

Pre-Show: Music + Slideshow + Party!

Opening

1. Land Acknowledgement

Every community owes its existence and vitality to generations from around the world who contributed their hopes, dreams, and energy to making the history that led to this moment. It is important for us all to reflect on the legacy that led us to reside on this land as we seek to understand our place within a global history of violence and displacement.

FAITH: While I can only trace my ancestral line back to Texas in the 1800s, I recognize that my ancestors were forcibly brought to this land against their will.

LAURA: While I know that some of my ancestors came to this land on the Mayflower, fleeing religious persecution, and others immigrated from Germany in hopes of economic prosperity, I also recognize that these same ancestors have actively contributed to the practice of colonization.

CONFIDENCE: [performed text not recorded in script].

SELENA: [performed text not recorded in script].

In this moment, we want to recognize the Indigenous people who have lived on the land now known as the United States for generations and who continue to thrive through years of both abundance and systemic oppression. While we recognize that a land acknowledgement does not erase the history and lasting impact of violence and displacement, we believe that truth and acknowledgement are critical steps toward unpacking our individual and collective relationships to colonization.

With this in mind, we begin our performance today by acknowledging that we are standing on the ancestral homelands of the Coahuiltecan (Kwa - wheel - tech - an), Lipan-Apache, Tonkawa, and Comanche people. We pay respects to their elders past, present, and future.

2. Introduce and frame PJP

For November 22 Performance: Voice 1-AsSu, Voice 2-NORTH BABY, Voice 3-CONFIDENCE

VOICE 1: Good evening and welcome to our Performing Justice Project, Fall 2019 performance. We are the PJP ensemble.

VOICE 2: For the past nine weeks, we have been working with our directors whom you just met, Faith and Laura, to explore gender and racial justice through performance. We've asked the following questions:

VOICE 3: Who am I? What is my relationship to and understanding of race, ethnicity, gender, and attraction?

VOICE 1: What is power? What is injustice?

VOICE 3: What is justice? How do I perform justice in my life?

VOICE 2: As we explored these questions, we created different performance pieces that we pulled together for this culminating showcase.

VOICE 1: We've also incorporated some of the rituals from our rehearsal process into this performance, so there will be moments when we'll ask you to participate with us. You never have to do anything you don't want to.

VOICE 2: Reflection has also been a big part of our process, so after the performance we'd like to reflect with you all about what we shared.

VOICE 3: Thank you for being here. We hope you enjoy Our Voice: Imagining a New World.

3. Warm-Up: 2x3xBradford

For November 22 Performance: Voice/Actor 1-AV, Voice/Actor 2-CIANA

VOICE 1: We are going to begin with an activity called two by three by Bradford. We did this activity every day in rehearsal as our opening ritual and now we are going to share it with you. To start, can everyone get into groups of two, and with your partner, find your own space in the room.

(Ensemble members who are not facilitating, partner with who you feel comfortable with.)

VOICE 2: With your partner, decide who will be partner A and who will be partner B. In your pair, please count from 1-3, with each person saying one number. Partner A says 'One', B says 'Two,' A says 'Three,' B says 'One,' A says 'Two,' B says 'Three' and so on.

(ACTORS 1 and 2 model for audience members what the counting from 1-3 will look and sound like.)

VOICE 1: Now, instead of saying ‘One,’ partner A will create a gesture and sound that both players can easily do to replace ‘One.’ While we are creating our sounds and gestures, we are asking you all to reflect on the word of the day, justice. How can your sounds and gestures be inspired by the word justice?

(ACTOR 1 models for audience the process of creating a sound and gesture inspired by the word justice. Model teaching the gesture to ACTOR 2 and resuming the counting sequence.)

VOICE 2: Now, instead of saying ‘Two,’ B will make up a movement and sound that both players can easily do to replace ‘Two.’ Remember to think about how your movements and sounds can represent justice.

(ACTOR 2 models for audience the process of creating a sound and gesture inspired by the word justice. Model teaching the gesture to ACTOR 1 and resuming the counting sequence.)

VOICE 1: Finally, instead of saying ‘Three,’ you and your partner will work together to make up a gesture and a sound that both players can easily do to replace ‘Three.’ For this last round, see how you and your partner can stretch yourselves to create a gesture and sound that is different, and possibly bigger than your previous two gestures.

(ACTOR 1 and 2 model for the audience the process of co-creating a sound and gesture inspired by the word justice. Model resuming the conversation, now with only sounds and gestures.)

VOICE 2: Can every pair, find another pair to partner with. In your new groups, each pair will take turns sharing the sequence that you and your partner created. You will share your sequence by repeating your back and forth conversation three times.

(ACTOR 1 and 2 model the sharing process. Model quickly the process of moving through the sequence three times. Check to make sure everyone understands instructions before continuing.)

VOICE 1: Thank you all for participating in this activity! You all can go back to your seats and we will transition into the next portion of our performance.

Transition—Statistic 1

For November 22 Performance: Actor 1-AV, Actor 2/Voice-NORTH BABY, Actor 3-CIANA, Actor 4-COOKIE

(ACTORS 1, 2, and 3 are in an arc behind ACTOR 4 who lies on the floor centerstage. ACTORS 1 and 2 freeze in a kicking position and ACTOR 3 freezes in a punching

position. ACTOR 4 rolls up and covers their face/body for protection. ACTOR 1 steps forward to read as the others stay frozen.)

VOICE 1: LGBT youth are two (*pause*)

(ACTOR 2 follows through on kick motion where ACTOR 4 used to lie.)

VOICE 1: times (*pause*)

(ACTOR 3 follows through on punch motion where ACTOR 4 used to lie.)

VOICE 1: As likely as their peers to say they have been physically assaulted, kicked, or shoved at school.

Movement One

1. “Truth About Me...”

NORTH BABY counts off and leads rhythm.

(Ensemble starts unison sound and rhythm. One at a time, each person introduces themselves to the audience using the below structure.)

ACTOR: My name is _____ and the truth about me _____.

Transition—Statistic 2

For November 22 Performance: ACTOR 1/VOICE 1-STAR, ACTOR 2-NORTH BABY, ACTOR 3-CIANA, ACTOR 4-AV, ACTOR 5-CONFIDENCE

(ACTORS 2 and 3 stand centerstage and create a heart together with their hands. Actors 4 and 5 stand upstage with their arms outstretched toward the heart. ACTOR 6 pushes on ACTORS 2 and 3’s arms from upstage, while ACTOR 1 crouches downstage looking up at the heart.)

VOICE 1: According to a 2015 report

ALL VOICES: 27% of LGBTQ students

VOICE 1: have been physically harassed at school because of their sexual orientation.

ALL VOICES: 13%

VOICE 1: have been physically harassed because of their gender identity.

Movement Two

1. Being a Woman Means

(All ACTORS freeze in a statue that expresses some idea about gender identity, gender expression, or attraction.)

STAR: To me,

ALL VOICES: being a woman means

ADRIANNA and CIANA: being strong,

STAR: A little scared of men,

COOKIE: And always cautious of your surroundings.

ALL VOICES: Being a woman means

NORTH BABY: beating the stereotype and stigma,

AsSu and AV: Being smart and kind / like a tree with strong roots and flexible branches.

(All ACTORS change their positions to freeze in second statue that expresses some idea about gender identity, gender expression, or attraction.)

ALL VOICES: Not being a woman

COOKIE: feels like it's defined by men.

AV and STAR: Manspreading and mansplaining,

CONFIDENCE: Not doubting yourself,

AsSu and NORTH BABY: Not knowing the struggle.

ALL VOICES: Not being a woman means

CIANA and STAR: feeling safer than others,

CIANA: Wearing what you want,

AsSu and CONFIDENCE: Going running at night,

AV: Not carrying your keys like wolverine claws while walking home.

(All ACTORS change their positions to freeze in third and final statue that expresses some idea about gender identity, gender expression, or attraction.)

ALL VOICES: But being a woman also means

NORTH BABY, CIANA, and AsSu: Holding yourself up tall when everything goes wrong,

ADRIANNA and COOKIE: Not giving up on things that you really want to do,

STAR: Never giving up on your dreams.

ALL VOICES: Being a woman means

NORTH BABY and AV: being feminine and strong at the same time,

AsSu: Being whoever you want to be without anybody telling you what to do.

ADRIANNA: To me,

ALL VOICES: being a woman means not defining womanhood for other people.

2. Letter to a Woman in the Future

[Stand in V shape with NORTH BABY and AV making the point upstage. A few steps downstage stands AsSu (stage right) and CIANA (stage left). A few more steps downstages stands CONFIDENCE (stage right) and COOKIE (stage left)]

Sound plays underneath/within.]

CONFIDENCE: Dear beautiful young woman,

COOKIE: Being a woman is hard. There will always be twists and turns in your life. But we're strong enough to overcome them.

CIANA: Be whoever you would love to be and never let anyone tell you differently

AV: If you were decked out in three layers of winter clothes, wearing a crop top and shorts, wearing a bikini, hell, if you were running around naked, you were, are not asking for it. It doesn't necessarily mean rape, it can mean being groped at a bar or someone making comments and inuendos.

NORTH BABY: Don't be afraid, Don't be afraid, Don't be afraid.

AsSu: When you read this as an adult, don't let it happen again. Don't let people take advantage of you again. You have the power to find justice.

ALL VOICES: All women are powerful.

Transition—Statistic 3

For November 22 Performance: ACTOR 1/VOICE 1-AV, ACTOR2-NORTH BABY, ACTOR 3-COOKIE, ACTOR 4-CIANA

(ACTOR 1 stands centerstage, with ACTORS 2, 3, and 4 standing in an arc behind them. ACTOR 1 shakes their hands near their head as they stumble around the semi-circle. One at a time ACTORS 2, 3, and 4 push ACTOR 1 away from them and then turn around so their back is to ACTOR 1 and the audience. After ACTORS 2, 3, and 4 have all turned around, ACTOR 1 steps forward to read.)

VOICE 1: (if actor identifies as Latinx) Hi, my name is _____, but a lot of people call me _____, because 24% of Latinx girls report being harassed because of their name or family's origin.

Movement Three

1. What is Race? What is Ethnicity?

(ACTORS will spread out in a semi-circle upstage center, facing the audience. One at a time, ACTORS will enter the playing space center stage and engage in a silent game of machine ACTORS will create machine(s) that responds to the prompt: Create a machine that represents power)

2. Six-Word Stories About Race

(Each six-word story is accompanied with a gesture, performed by the speaker, a small group, or the full ensemble.)

AsSu: Ain't nobody perfect, so why judge.

CIANA: [performed story not recorded in script]

R: Don't ever compare my life to yours.

JASMIN: Look twenty-one, but seventeen.

STAR: [performed story not recorded in script]

H: Where do I stand? White girl.

NORTH BABY: Did drugs, still a good man.

AV: “I don’t see color.” Stop lying.

Transition—Statistic 4

For November 22 Performance: ACTOR 1-NORTH BABY, ACTOR 2-AsSu, ACTOR 3-CONFIDENCE, VOICE 1-CIANA

(ACTORS 1, 2 and 3 huddled together center stage with ACTOR 1 in the center and ACTORS 2 and 3 on either side. ACTORS mime playing or interacting with each other.)

VOICE 1: In 2013, 40% of youth committed to juvenile facilities were African American.

(ACTOR 1, remaining in the center walks to downstage center and lays down, stomach to the ground with hands behind head. ACTOR 2 walks to downstage center and kneels with hands behind head.)

VOICE 1: Native youth were more than 3x more likely to be committed than White youth. Hispanic youth were 1.6x more likely to be committed.

(ACTOR 1 stands and poses as if writing a ticket/warning. ACTOR 2, looks up at ACTOR 1, while holding one arm in the air as if released.. ACTOR 3 holds one of ACTOR 2’s arms behind their back.)

Movement Four

1. Justice Poem

ALL VOICES: What do you believe?

(slight pause)

NORTH BABY, CONFIDENCE, AsSu: I believe

COOKIE: in myself.

CONFIDENCE: that I am strong and confident.

NORTH BABY: I am unique.

CIANA, STAR, and AV: I believe

AV: in building each other up,

CIANA and AV: not dragging people down

CIANA, STAR, and AV: for your own benefit.

AsSu and ADRIANNA: I believe

ONE VOICE (*Victoria*): every person alive

ONE VOICE (*Marianna*): every person waiting yet to be born

TWO VOICES (*Marianna, Victoria*): should have equal rights.

ALL VOICES: What do you hope for?

AV, CONFIDENCE, and STAR: My hope

AV: for today,

CONFIDENCE: tomorrow,

STAR: and the future

AV: is that the world will be brave and actually dream;

CONFIDENCE: that people who are hurting will hurt less,

STAR: and people who are mad will end the day with laughter.

NORTH BABY, CIANA, and COOKIE: I hope...

NORTH BABY: that police don't discriminate against Black people

NORTH BABY, CIANA, and COOKIE and treat everyone the same;

COOKIE: that treaties are honored

CIANA: and that people respect other people's gender,

NORTH BABY, CIANA, and COOKIE whatever they wanna be.

AsSu, CONFIDENCE, AV, and STAR: I hope

CONFIDENCE: I keep asking questions louder

AsSu, CONFIDENCE, AV, and STAR: and louder

AV and STAR: I hope

STAR: that my people are taken care of

AV: and that my identity makes me feel celebrated in the world, not nervous walking through it.

AsSu: I hope more people like me will be listened to.

ALL VOICES: But how will you get there?

AsSu: We perform justice

NORTH BABY: and change the world.

ALL VOICES: But HOW?

CIANA: By being myself,

STAR: showing up,

AV: and being seen and heard

CIANNA, STAR, and AV: I perform justice

ALL VOICES: and change the world.

CONFIDENCE: When I use my voice,

CIANA: my trials,

AsSu: my future choices

CONFIDENCE, CIANA, and AsSu: To stop all violence

CIANA: I perform justice

ALL VOICES: and change the world

AsSu: When we,

NORTH BABY and CONFIDENCE: smart and intelligent people,

AV: build others up to their potential

AV and AsSu: we perform justice

ALL VOICES: and change the world.

CIANA: ...but what is justice?

Justice for Us Means (from summer 2019 pilot)

For November 22 Performance: VOICE 1-AsSu, VOICE 2-NORTH BABY, VOICE 3-AV, VOICE 4-COOKIE, VOICE 5-CIANA, VOICE 6-ADRIANNA, VOICE 7-CONFIDENCE

(ACTOR 1 standing on a chair center stage. ACTOR 2 (right) and ACTOR 3 (left) standing one step in front of ACTOR 1. ACTOR 4 (stageright) and ACTOR 5 (stageleft) standing downstage, forming a V. ACTOR 6 and ACTOR 7 sitting on the floor in front of ACTOR 1.)

EVERYONE: Justice for us means

VOICE 1: education for **all**.

EVERYONE: all (*echoed in ripples*)

VOICE 2: Seeing past our **race**.

EVERYONE: Justice for us means

VOICE 3: not being judged based on sexual orientation.

VOICE 4: loving whoever. (*Everyone make heart gesture of choice.*)

EVERYONE: Justice for us means

VOICE 5 & 6: having the freedom to **SPEAK**.

VOICE 7: being treated with respect.

VOICE 3: seeing our emotions.

EVERYONE: Justice for us means

VOICE 4: being heard. (*quietly*)

VOICE 1: What?

VOICE 4 & 7: Being heard. (*louder*)

VOICE 1: What?

EVERYONE: Being heard! (*loudest*)

2. Hope For The Future

(Performers move from community poem stage picture to a standing circle facing each other inward. Each performer shares their hope for the future with the ensemble.)

ACTOR: My name is _____. In the future, I hope _____.

Closing

1. I Have a Voice

(One performer step out of the circle, and invite the audience to join the circle in one large standing circle.)

LEADER 1: We would like to end our performance with the closing ritual we did at the end of every rehearsal. To start, we invite you to join us in a standing circle.

(Pause until the ensemble and audience are together in a circle.)

LEADER 2: This is a call and response, so please repeat after us and do what we do, with our voices and bodies. [NAME OF LEADER 1] will start us off.

LEADER 1: I have a voice.

ENSEMBLE + AUDIENCE: I have a voice.

LEADER 1: My voice is powerful.

ENSEMBLE + AUDIENCE: My voice is powerful.

LEADER 1: My voice can change the world.

ENSEMBLE + AUDIENCE: My voice can change the world.

LEADER 2: I have a voice.

ENSEMBLE + AUDIENCE: I have a voice.

LEADER 2: My voice is powerful.

ENSEMBLE + AUDIENCE: My voice is powerful.

LEADER 2: My voice can change the world.

ENSEMBLE + AUDIENCE: My voice can change the world.

FULL ENSEMBLE: We have a voice.

AUDIENCE: We have a voice.

FULL ENSEMBLE: Our voice is powerful.

AUDIENCE: Our voice is powerful.

FULL ENSEMBLE: Our voice can change the world.

AUDIENCE: Our voice can change the world.

2. Reflection

FAITH and LAUR lead audience and ensemble in post-performance reflection

Post-Show: PARTY!

APPENDIX B: REHEARSAL #9 PLAN

PJP @ Resident Place—Fall 2019

October, 29, 2019, 6-7:30p

Teaching Artists: Faith Hillis, Laura Epperson

Rehearsal #9: Power + Injustice

Guiding Question: *How do power and injustice show up in our lives?*

Word of the Day: Power

Goals:

To define power and explore how it operates, both interpersonally and systemically

To discuss statistics connected to racial and gender injustice

To create short performance(s) of statistics

Arrive and Settle In (10 minutes)

Agenda + Check-In (5 minutes)

- Review rehearsal agenda
- Check-in question: If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go?

2x3xBradford (10 minutes)

- Invite participants to get into pairs facing each other. One person will be A and one will be B.
- First, pairs count up to three out loud a number of times. Invite participants to try to get this sequence going as fast as possible.
- Next, instead of saying ‘One,’ A will make up a movement and sound that both players can easily do to replace ‘One.’ **This movement and sound could be inspired by the word of the day.**
- Now, instead of saying ‘Two,’ B will make up a movement and sound that both players can easily do to replace ‘Two.’
- Finally, instead of saying ‘Three,’ A and B will work together to make up a movement and sound that both players can easily do to replace ‘Three.’
- Encourage participants to use movements and sounds that are different from one another.
- **Invite pairs to share their conversation with the group, if they’d like.**

Great Game of Power (25 minutes)

Adapted from Devising Critically Engaged Theatre with Youth: The Performing Justice Project *by* Megan Alrutz and Lynn Hoare.

- Ask for a volunteer artist to silently arrange three chairs and water bottle so that one chair becomes the most powerful object in the image.
- Any of the objects can be moved or placed on top of each other, or on their sides, or in any configuration, but none of the objects can be removed altogether from the space.
- Let them know that the artist will not reveal their thinking behind the arrangement but will offer the image to the rest of the group for consideration.
- After the artist has completed their image, they will return to the group. Invite the group to move around the image, to see it from all angles and take it in silently.
- The next part of the activity really relies on group reflection and “reading” of the artwork created. During this reflection, ask the artist to remain silent and take in the different interpretations of their work. This activity isn’t about everyone guessing correctly the artist’s intention, rather thinking about how one image can spark a multiplicity of stories and ideas.
- Once everyone has taken in the image, invite the group to describe what they see in the image: How are the chairs arranged? How is the water bottle arranged? Ask them to really name out what they observe, but not what it means.
- After they have described what they notice about the image, ask: Which chair has the most power in the image and why? Encourage different readings of the image from various people.
- Possible questions for each sculpture:
- If this were a representation of a moment in life, identify what could be happening here?
 - Who are characters in this moment?
 - How is power at play here?
 - Did social locations or identity markers play into your perceptions, assumptions, readings of these images?
 - **Specifically, how does gender play into your perceptions, assumptions, reading of these images?**
 - **When you think about which item has the most power, and you think about this as bodies, do you consider the race or ethnicity of the bodies? How? Where does this show up?**
- After everyone has shared their ideas, you can invite the artist to share what they were thinking or imagining as they created the image.
- Try creating another image. Repeat the reflection process.
- This time during the reflection, **invite the group to consider how an image tells a story.**
- To move GGP into performance, invite each person to write their own definition for power. Decide on one (or two) of the sculptures to recreate while folx read their power definitions out loud.
- **Reflection**

- Where was your eye drawn in the pictures? These are things we will continue to consider as we move forward creating frozen images with our own bodies on stage.
- What kinds of power are we talking about? Let's write these down to refer to later. *Encourage youth to articulate what kind of power they are referring to - personal agency, systemic power, the power of an institution that backs an individual, etc.*

Activating Statistics (35 minutes)

Adapted from Devising Critically Engaged Theatre with Youth: The Performing Justice Project by Megan Alrutz and Lynn Hoare.

- Prepare a list of statistics that relate to or reflect conversations and identities in the room.
 - According to the National Women's Law Center's "Let Her Learn Survey" (2017):
 - Students of color are more likely to attend schools with fewer math and science courses than White students:
 - Native American girls are most likely to attend high school with no chemistry, calculus, and physics classes. (30-38%)
 - Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls are second most likely (14-34%)
 - Black girls are third most likely (19-28%)
 - Latina girls are fourth most likely (13-21%)
 - 48% of Native American girls say that not having access to the courses they want makes it hard to go to school.
 - 24% of Latina girls report being harassed because of their name or family's origin.
 - Black girls are 5.5x more likely and Native American girls are 3x more likely to be suspended from school than white girls.
 - According to a 2016 Human Rights Campaign report:
 - LGBT youth are 2x as likely as their peers to say they have been physically assaulted, kicked or shoved at school.
 - 92% of LGBT youth say they hear negative messages about being LGBT. The top sources are school, the Internet and their peers.
 - 73% of LGBT youth say they are more honest about themselves online than in the real world.
 - 9 in 10 LGBT youth say they are out to their close friends and 64% say they are out to their classmates.
 - According to The Sentencing Project:
 - Roughly 56% of all youth in the US are White (non-Hispanic); In 2013, only 32% of youth committed to juvenile facilities were White.

- Slightly more than 16% of all youth in the US are African American. In 2013, 40% of juveniles committed to juvenile facilities were African American.
 - Native juveniles were more than 3x more likely to be committed than White juveniles. Hispanic youth were 1.6x more likely to be committed.
 - According to Center for American Progress in 2012:
 - Gay and transgender youth represent 5-7% of the overall youth population, but compose 13-15 percent of youth currently in the juvenile legal system.
 - Of the 300,000 gay and transgender youth who are arrested and/or detained each year, more than 60% are Black or Latino.
 - According to the National Women's Law Center's 2019 Wage Gap fact sheet, on average in the US:
 - White women make \$0.82 for every \$1 non-Hispanic, White men make
 - Black women make \$0.62 for every \$1 non-Hispanic, White men make
 - Native women make \$0.57 for every \$1 non-Hispanic, White men make
 - Latinas make \$0.54 for every \$1 non-Hispanic, White men make
- Read statistics (project on powerpoint) for full group.
 - **Which of these statistics stand out to you? Why?**
 - **Are any of these statistics surprising? Why or Why Not?**
- As we've discussed, a part of working towards enacting or creating justice in our lives is uncovering truth in various ways. One way to do that is by activating statistics and information that reflects the injustices that we/others face.
- ***Either in pairs or as a whole group:*** choose one statistic that stands out to you, or that you think needs more attention, or that you think people need to know about. Work to create a frozen image to illustrate a statistic and discover a way to perform the text to help people really hear it.
- Think about what this statistic might look like in a frozen image. What is the context of this statistic, where does this happen? Who is part of that picture? Who is affected by this situation? What role do others play?
 - Think about how to read/perform your statistic. Should one person read it? Is there a piece that you want to emphasize? What will help your audience really hear and understand and make sense of the statistics?
- **Reminder:** As we are creating these images, remember these are abstract representations of the statistics. We will be playing characters, not ourselves.
- If there's time, record statistic performance(s) and playback. Possible reflection questions:

- **What do you notice when you see all of these statistics performed together?**
- **Which statistics represent your truths?**

“I have a voice” (5 minutes)

- Lead participants in a call and response of “I have a voice.” Play with tempo, volume, and quality of sounds. Repeat about three times.
 - I have a voice.
 - My voice is powerful.
 - My voice can change the world.

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Vita

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This thesis was typed by the author.