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Publication Date

2015

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Making Stories, Writing the World

Critical Strategies for Arts-Based Practices with Los Angeles Urban Youth

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance

by

Jennifer Monique Delgado

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Making Stories, Writing the World

Critical Strategies for Arts-Based Practices with Los Angeles Urban Youth

by

Jennifer Monique Delgado

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor David Gere, Chair

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary analysis, utilizing oral history, ethnographic methods to interrogate three community-based arts intervention projects spanning a twenty-four year history in Los Angeles, California. Engaging with arts practice, critical film theory, critical pedagogy, empowerment theories, postcolonial theory, and third wave feminism this dissertation analyzing how these projects attempted to create significant change in response to three devastating social issues affecting urban youth (the AIDS crisis, poverty, and the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising). Analysis includes a historicization of the interventions' designs and pedagogies, including how understanding dialectical art theories and lived experience pushed these programs to better serve their communities. The dissertation concludes with the definition of seven radical maneuvers identified across these projects that can be utilized to bolster the efficacy of arts engagement in working toward social justice. The resulting framework supports the development of critical

consciousness through art process to best support urban youth in navigating their social conditions, validating their experiences as culture-makers, and creating social change through the arts.

The dissertation of Jennifer Monique Delgado is approved.

Dallas Swendeman

Aparna Sharma

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David Gere, Committee Chair

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2015

This is dedicated to my Nana Rose, who gave me my voice
and my grandma Alice who gave me the *ganas* to use it.

This is also dedicated to the families:

Acuña Alvarado Babich Briano Black Brown Carrel Chavez Contreras Delgado Garner George
Gomez Gray Hayakawa Hernández Kelley King Leddy Lim Lopez Marín Martin Martínez
Monroe Muñoz Murata Murugesan Otero Padilla Portillo Rice Robles Rubén Rubío Russell
Scott Sharma Tejas Tellez Velasquez Wilbur Williams Wilson and Zambrano

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There have been countless numbers of individuals who have inspired me to take each step of this odyssey and I feel incapable of expressing in words my gratitude for their support. First, thank you to my dream-team of a committee. Thank you to Dallas Swendeman for your curiosity and eagerness to explore the intersections of empowerment theory and the arts. Thank you to Aparna Sharma for your passion as both a scholar and practitioner and the rigor with which you challenged me to hold fast to my own principles as a practitioner. Thank you to Janet O’Shea for your openness and for your immense capacity to synthesize and articulate ideas. Thank you to my Chair, David Gere, for your relentless support of this project and for believing in it when I was too exhausted to do so myself.

Thank you to all of my colleagues who made the time to remember and discuss these projects. Alex Acuña, Jill Aguilar, Chris Anthony, Dani Bedau, Jack Carrel, John Copeland, Oliver Goldstick, Nina Mancina, Ximena Morgan, Elizabeth Rainey, Marcela Robles, Lisa Russell, I hope that I have done justice to your legacy. Thank you to all the former youth participants who also made the time to reflect and discuss their experiences in these projects. Alma Catalán, Arely Diaz, Geoff Decrucq, Janet De La Cruz, Cortelyou Ellis, Gina Esposito, Alberto Hernández, Karen Gomez, Arturo Guzman, Kirby Lopez, Mary Lopez, Armando Martinez, Brian Martinez, Ernesto Sopprani, Lex Stepling, and Natasha Van Brynke, my greatest wish is that I have earned your trust.

Thank you to all the art-makers, activists, and youth advocates that have become a part of my extended community throughout the years. Our conversations and your influence helped me formulate ideas and hold on to my integrity as a practitioner in the world of academia. Ana

Maria Alvarez-Lowe, Dolores Chavez, Judeth Oden Choi, Corky Dominguez, Cristina Frias, Peter Howard, Skyler Jackson, Sergio Marín, Lori Nelson, Marina Oliva, Cheray O’Neal, Angelica Otero, Eddie Padilla, Laura Palomares, Rose Portillo, Claudia Hernández Romero, Jon Royal, Ivan Robles, María Solano, Amy Tien, Ben Wright, may we always listen, question, and support each other.

Thank you to my graduate school colleagues for many, many things: for your intellect; for challenging me; for long talks; for genuinely asking how I was doing; for inviting me into the fold when the grad school transition was paralyzing me; for making me laugh; for asking me to perform with you; for trusting me with your vulnerability; for saying what needed to be said; for saving me on more than one occasion; and for letting me borrow your editing skills. Rosemary Candelario, Alison D’Amato, Mana Hayakawa, Sarah Leddy, Leonard Melchor, Meena Murugesan, Nguyen Nguyen, Mathew Sandoval, Carolina San Juan, Alexx Schilling, Sarah Wilbur, Alessandra Williams, Kat Williams, and Alison Wyper you have been like oxygen to a drowning woman.

Thank you to my *sisters-from-other-mothers*, Doran George, Karen Gomez, Irene Lim, and Raquel Monroe. Doran, you listened during my darkest hours and saved my sanity, thank you for talking me down from the ledge – and for being a champion hugger. Karen, you have been an inspiration to me since the day we met – keep your head up, baby girl. Irene, thanks for the laughter and for letting me crash at your house when I needed to escape. Raquel, I would never have dared follow this dream if not for your example – thank you for your audacity and for showing me the possibilities, Dr. Monroe.

Finally, thank you to my Mom and Dad for believing in me and for teaching me the importance of always doing the best I can. I love you beyond words.

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INTRODUCTION

I was eighteen years old in 1991 when I joined Project ABLE, a theater collective, in my hometown of *Ehl-lay* (L.A.). Project ABLE (AIDS Beliefs Learned through Education) was an educational theater project addressing HIV prevention and drug use for high-risk youth. I was a member from 1991 to 1994. Our repertoire consisted of one-act plays about youth whose lives are changed when someone close to them is diagnosed with AIDS. Each session consisted of the play followed by an educational workshop led by actors. We taught basic HIV information, including strategies to minimize the risk of HIV infection from sexual activity and intravenous drug use; designed and staffed carnival-like game booths at community fairs; and facilitated discussions about the connections among relationship dynamics, communication, and HIV risk. We utilized a humorous, candid, and forthright style. This was our trademark and was the cornerstone of our reputation. The work integrated several fields, including educational theater, arts activism, peer counseling, health education, and drug education.

We performed on make-shift stages in non-mainstream facilities, such as juvenile halls, detention camps, and gathering spaces for CYA (California Youth Authority); on the stage of the outdoor amphitheaters of juvenile detention camps; under the (101) Freeway overpasses down the street from our office in Hollywood; an hour before lights out at L.A. Youth Network, a night shelter; on the day-room floor of My Friends Place, a drop-in center; in the cafeteria of the Way In, a homeless youth resource center; and in the living rooms of group foster homes. Our audiences were youth defined as high-risk, homeless, foster, incarcerated, mentally ill, non-mainstream, unpredictable, violent, hostile, non-compliant, and delinquent.

The ensemble was purposely made up of a range of young people, all in our teens to early twenties. The series of program administrators had always sought to recruit people from a mix

of backgrounds, so members of the audience would feel that they saw themselves reflected in the cast. We, therefore, represented a vast spectrum of circumstances and experiences. Our training helped us develop a sophisticated vocabulary to discuss the impact of social conditions upon personal experience. Our different ethnic, economic, artistic, and geographic backgrounds contributed to why we were a strong versatile team for an equally diverse audience. The members during my tenure were artists of various media: actors, poets, performance artists, singer/songwriters, dancers, musicians, and visual artists. A few were attending local performing arts high schools where they had been recruited or were completing an undergraduate degree at various local colleges, such as Los Angeles Community College, Valley Community College, UCLA, and Cal State LA. One or two of the older members, when I first started, had completed a bachelor of fine arts degree while working with Project ABLE. Several regularly performed in the independent theater circuit of Los Angeles. Several aspired to work in television and film and were out on auditions regularly, while others were involved in more avant-garde performance work.

When I joined the ensemble members were Raquel, Ivan, Tanya, Jenny, Gina, Art, Ricky, Lauren, Lance, Ken, Debbie, Brook, Andrew, and myself. Jack Carrel, the Program Administrator, and Kerry Miguel, the Artistic Director hired all of us. The duo selected us from our auditions and our interviews because we were skilled actors who were intelligent and represented a diverse range with regard to ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, as well as personal experience that reflected the demographics of the youth we served. When I look at the list of names of my colleagues, I am reminded of what we were meant to represent. We were highly conscientious about representation. We felt a certain level of pride knowing that each one of us, individually, had something unique to offer to the success of the project. To be sure, we often

considered our diversity to be an important aspect of *why* the project was so effective. In fact, we were so comfortable with our respective labels, we used to tease one another about it, referring to each other by the identity markers, we represented. We would, tongue in cheek, use terms such as *Bilingual Latina*, a.k.a., *The Translator*; *Rich Girl With A Cause*; *Alternative White Girl*; *Black Straight Edge Dude*; *Bilingual Alternative Musician*; *Space Cadet*; *Black Punk*; *Italian New Yorker*; *Recovering Addict*; *Bisexual White Girl*; *Straight Preppy White Girl*; *All American*; *East LA Chicana Ingénue*; *Punk White Boy Artist*; *Agnostic Jewish Dude*. At any given performance, the collection of four to eight cast members present reflected the unique diversity of the city of Los Angeles.

In 1992, a new administrator began to work with us. Trained in health education, she integrated the harm reduction model of health education and social services widely used at the time to the project. Harm reduction continues to be an approach “aiming to reduce harm stemming from health-related behaviors (e.g., substance use, risky sexual behavior) that are considered to put the affected individuals and/or their communities at risk for negative consequences” (Marlatt, 2012). This approach developed from a recognition that some people will continue to engage in high-risk behaviors even as they experience resulting harm and grew as a humanistic and pragmatic alternative to abstinence-based approaches with the goal of reducing the level of harm experienced by individuals and their communities. Harm reduction theory allows providers to work with individuals to reduce their risks with the goal of improving the client’s quality of life and the conditions of their community without being encumbered by trying to force a client to become abstinent. Instead, this approach is rooted in the thought that “people will make more health-positive choices if they have access to adequate support, empowerment, and education” (Marlatt, 2012). It permits providers to develop a complex

system of alternatives for clients to address their needs at multiple points along a spectrum of high-risk behaviors. Prior to harm reduction approaches, the provider's role in the treatment of substance use and unhealthy sexual behavior was narrowly defined by teaching about abstinence. The harm reduction approach expanded the possibility of services that providers could offer to support clients in learning how to make healthier choices, incrementally.

This brought about a series of changes in how we interacted with the audience and client base. Previously, we had informed our audience about the modes of HIV transmission and prevention in a didactic, lecture format, including two demonstrations that we would mime to explain how to use condoms properly and how to use syringes as safely as possible, however, with the new direction we broke from this didactic model. Simultaneously, in the theatrical aspect of the program, the artistic director introduced the cast to Boalian methods, Viewpoints techniques, and theater improvisation. We would workshop these techniques for a short period. After which we would tweak everything according to how productive it was for the audience. What evolved was an adapted repertoire reminiscent of Augusto Boal's techniques from *Theatre of the Oppressed* (I will elaborate on Boal in chapter one).

As soon as we switched to the emphasis on participatory learning, our practice transformed and we began to see new possibilities emerge during our work. We were able to deepen the conversations with our audiences about healthy decision-making, personal agency, self-empowerment, relationship dynamics, and sexual agency. The level of quality in the two fundamental components of the program (the play and the education) reached an important balance. The candid tone in the plays, and the level of interaction during the follow-up workshop sessions, allowed us to address taboo subjects with open candor. This was in stark contrast to the general silence regarding sexual health and sexual agency across the public

sphere. Youth would approach us more frequently to ask personal questions in private. We made deeper connections and felt the degree of trust amplify in this new phase with the growing number of people that came in after these performances/workshops. We constantly received letters and calls with questions, concerns, and the occasional marriage proposal.

Public health professionals from the Los Angeles Free Clinic provided administrative oversight for the project. They were highly sensitive to the fact that building relationships with youth would forward the outreach goals of the clinic. The intensity of audience response to our theatrical intervention convinced the administration that they could use the ensemble as a health resource. They quickly understood that our connection with the population could support the outreach strategies for the organization. We then trained as HIV counselors and began to see clients in-house. In this facet of the project as well, the clients began to make repeat visits. As we built trust and rapport in this capacity, they would request to see specific actor-counselors among us to follow up on particular concerns. The administration recognized that we were having a deep influence upon the clients, who were responding to the opportunity to reflect, challenge, support, and reframe their decision-making habits.

Project ABLE's reputation for effectiveness grew at both the local and the national levels. The parent organization, the Los Angeles Free Clinic, was invited in 1992 to join a network of other social service organizations as part of the Prototypes Cross Training Consortium. Prototypes was a social service organization founded in 1986 that offered health, mental health, and substance abuse services for women and their children. Their mission was to develop innovative models of service delivery; promote health and psychosocial well-being on an individual, family, and organizational level; to meet emerging community needs, to implement

pilot tests of these models, refine the models based on research data, then disseminate the models to others through training and consultation.

The Prototypes Training Consortium project was one of the first of its kind in the country designed to provide training to healthcare providers regarding effective education, prevention and intervention strategies for treating HIV/AIDS and chemical dependency, particularly as it related to youth, communities of color, and women. The project brought together several non-profit organizations that were experts in various fields of health, advocacy, and social services to collaborate on developing training protocols for providers. The member agencies included Children's Hospital Los Angeles – Division of Adolescent Medicine, the Los Angeles Free Clinic, Alta Med Health Services, Bienestar, The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, and Tarzana Treatment Center.

The consortium was funded by the City of Los Angeles, Department of Health and Human Services Office of AIDS Programs and Policies. Each of the HIV and/or chemical dependency member organizations within this consortium were known at the national level to be experts in working with various populations: adults and youth who were gay, lesbian, bisexual; chemically dependent; homeless; incarcerated; HIV positive; and survivors of domestic violence. In 1993, at just shy of twenty years old, I was asked to become a trainer as a representative of the Los Angeles Free Clinic. In addition to the other issues already mentioned, I trained adults on sexual health, relationship dynamics, structural inequality, communication skills, and group facilitation dynamics. Six months later, I joined Prototypes as a full-time trainer hoping to have a greater impact on the field. When I began with Project ABLE at the age of eighteen, I had no familiarity with the ideological or pedagogical arguments being made through Project ABLE's work, but as my career developed, I quickly grew to understand that the work existed at a unique

cross section of arts intervention, the youth empowerment movement, radical pedagogy, and HIV services.

I sit writing this document in the year 2015 and since my time with Project ABLE, I have continued to work as a facilitator and in various other capacities in arts interventions. Those projects have utilized multiple art forms to focus on issues of health education, youth development, human relations, and social justice in non-profit, grass roots, and (now as a graduate student) academic arenas. The titles of the positions that I am asked to fill continue to be *teaching artist*, *artist facilitator*, and *artist mentor*. However, I tend to refer to myself as an *arts facilitator*. This title best reflects the perspectives—the opinions, judgment, insight—and skills that I am asked to contribute to a collaborative arts intervention.

Admittedly, the term is highly esoteric and unfamiliar to most practitioners in various fields that participate in arts interventions – the arts, human relations, community organizing, health promotion, youth development, or education. In community-based art-making processes that have the resources and the capacity to bring staff on board to specialize in specific roles of the collaboration, and in contexts where each element of the administration, the art, and the learning is stewarded by a specific person, the *arts facilitator* is the individual who oversees the process for the participants. The artists will oversee the teaching, making, and collaborating necessary in the generating of new material for the project. The arts facilitator tries to synthesize the art-making with the educational development goals and thematic needs so that all sets of goals are supported at the same time. This person works prior to the project in the design phases with the artists to settle on goals and priorities and then throughout the process, the arts facilitator creates opportunities for community members to explore, share, and listen to ideas. Ideally, the arts facilitator creates a process that helps participants take ownership of it, helps

sustain everyone's participation, balances the needs of all these elements so that the art is infused with the voice of participants, and the art-making happens while encouraging critical thinking and shared power. To many community-based artists, including myself, the process is crucial. Still others are not as invested in engaging in a comprehensive approach, either because time is limited or the design community engagement for the project is less complex. In the practices that I am interested in with urban youth, the process includes the development of criticality. This strategy best prepares young people to understand the social cultural challenges facing working class, communities of color, and urban youth in the twenty-first century.

I have created a theoretical framework for understanding the complexities of art intervention work by examining three case studies in this dissertation of Los Angeles based art projects: Project ABLE, a youth theater ensemble taking on issues regarding HIV risk among local adolescents; STAHR!, a film based sexual health promotion program for young women; and Will Power To Youth, an annual theater-based youth employment and literacy program. In analyzing these programs, I wish to begin a deep exploration in the theoretical and practical threads of arts facilitation and community-based art-making with urban youth. I hope to encourage a cross disciplinary approach to community-based arts in a quest to support a critical investment in identity development and community-building across the field. Necessarily, this is a multi-layered analysis to collaborative art-making for that reason. There are four disciplines or bodies of literature that I will lean upon as cornerstones of this dissertation: performance studies, media studies (specifically film theory and critical media literacy), critical pedagogy, and empowerment theory.

I intend to further nuance this exploration by intersecting the existing literature from performance studies, media studies, critical pedagogy, empowerment theory, with Chicana

feminisms, and critical race theory to propose an innovative strategy for critical arts pedagogy. I argue that the function of art-making is fundamentally rooted in identity-making and that the *how* and *what* that youth are taught about the arts shapes their understanding of themselves and their community. As public arts education programs dwindle urban, working class, communities of color, and marginalized populations are prevented from any access to art practice and their capacities to understand themselves as culture-makers and social agents are undermined. Indeed, art education models are increasingly more focused upon teaching arts appreciation and not art practice. This is an extreme cause for concern as the values imbued within this model are those borne from the art world and from commercial models of arts participation where art is rarefied and elite; art is an expression of individual freedom; the value of art is defined by the monetary value it brings from collectors; art is the realm of individual genius; art is transcendent, yet universal; art is recognizable for its innovation; art is above the ordinary; art is neutral until an artist chooses to engage in politics and is de-contextual. These values obscure a utilitarian conception of arts generating from urban, working class, communities of color, and marginalized populations. Utilitarian art is steeped in the everyday and reflects a system of values for resistance and survival; explores the position of the marginalized; addresses aspects of a shared marginalized identity; unpacks and redefines dominant discourses regarding a marginalized identity; is affirming of life experience; critiques social conditions. In contrast, the values of elite art tend to obscure issues of power, class, and identity in a manner that recapitulates social hierarchies.

The power of art is that it is an agent of social construction wherein ideologies can be produced, challenged, and transformed. Engaged artists have the power to assist youth in developing critical thinking with regard to art, art-making, and art consumption. My central

assertion is that artistic engagement with marginalized youth must include a critical engagement so that youth understand how the issues and social conditions of their lives are refracted by artistic practice. Conversely, when they better understand this, they can better understand how they can create social change through the arts. These three case studies, which follow, are offered as examples of how artists have tried to incorporate these notions of criticality into specific arts interventions and the interdisciplinary analysis of them is my attempt to understand how these programs made interventions that have proven to be great influences in youth developing critical thinking skills, making identity, and creating community.

Performance Studies and Engaged Art for Urban Youth

Critical and dialogic arts facilitation can often fall outside of conventional paradigms of arts practice and industries, and the general field of collaborative community-based arts practice is an esoteric and amorphous field. This makes it difficult to establish a consistent vocabulary for the work of interweaving criticality into collaborative art-making, particularly in the performance literature. As a graduate student, I have had the opportunity to reflect upon and theorize the traditions I have been trained in and which continue to influence my practice, e.g. critical pedagogy, human relations dialogue facilitation, critical race theory, social services, HIV education, theater, youth development, art activism, and community organizing. I have come to understand the *interdisciplinarity* of arts facilitation and certain principles that are vital to community-based art collaborations with youth: *identity, community, art quality, power, intersectionality, critical self-reflection, dialogic process, decentralizing authority, and empowerment*. Such interdisciplinarity builds on Jan Cohen-Cruz's notion of the hyphenated relationship innate to community-building contexts, wherein the art-making is rooted in a

doubled purpose. In such cases, the art-making serves two equal objectives, that of making the art and that of a number of “other human endeavors” (Cohen-Cruz, 2005).

Cohen-Cruz writes extensively about the lineages of community-based performance practice in the United States and names several categories, each with distinctive contexts and aesthetic frameworks: pageantry; cultural self-representation and social recognition; local performance participation; audience expansion; place-based art; experimentation and social response; and civil rights/social justice. The evolution of these lineages spans a century of U.S. history reflecting varying concerns for educational access, individual development, cultural celebration, personal empowerment, political advocacy, and community-building. Cohen-Cruz also reveals a pattern among the experiences of artists involved with these practices. There are a significant number of artists and artist groups in this history that share an identity with the community—and in some cases, originate from the very community that serves as the site of that work. However, artists crossing lines of difference (identity, culture, class, and practice) lead the vast majority of community-based projects. Beyond stipulating that this happens, in large part, as a consequence of established funding practices, Cohen-Cruz provides little exploration of the impact that this may have on project design or the relational aspect of projects with community members. The analysis of this dissertation will depart from this path and create a framework for explicit examination of all identities involved in practice.

I will address how each project negotiates “difference” as an aspect of community-based engagement. Notions of intersectionality, indeed, are infrequently employed in the community-based arts literature and practice to understand the complexities of engaged project design and execution. I engage with such analysis to make clear that the political ideology of teaching artists is always present. Indeed, how dominant that ideology is depends on the artist’s practice

of critical self-reflection and upon her or his understanding of reciprocity. A project's efficacy is almost completely reliant upon the artist's sensitivity to the nuances of lived experience. An artist's success is complementarily dependent upon the approach utilized within a projects design to recognize and acknowledge difference between community members and artists. The measurement of success can be impossible unless mentor artists consider what impact the project will have and, further, what impact the intervention is capable of having upon the youth participants' social contexts.

Community is a term that will be used frequently throughout this dissertation.

Community is defined in the Merriam Webster dictionary as 1) "A group who live in the same areas (such as a city, town, or neighborhood; 2) "a group of people who have the same interests, religion, race, etc.; 3) "a group of nations" (4th Ed., 2007). In much of the literature, the term is used to refer to specific sites of practice and particular groups engaged by an arts project. I will elaborate extensively on how I define that term in Chapter 4. Jan Cohen-Cruz, one of the leading scholars of community-building performance and arts practice offers a definition upon which I will elaborate to develop a critical definition. She explains community is "a shared primary identity based in place, ethnicity, class, race, sexual preference, profession, circumstances, or political orientation" (Cohen-Cruz, 2005, 2). She enlists the ideas of scholars Richard Owen Geer, Don Adams, and Arlene Goldfarb. Geer does not directly define what *community* is, but explains community as both a motivation for and as a potential site for "cultural democracy." The problem is that in order to achieve democracy, the operations of power must be made explicit in the process of decentralizing authority. The vagueness in defining the term negates the particular identities present in marginalized communities, which ultimately recapitulates the imbalance of power contrary to democracy.

Using a critical lens, however, makes the importance of defining community explicitly, and sheds light on the implicit meanings in the term. Scholars, artists, intellectuals tend to rely on a definition of *culture*, which has been utilized within the field of anthropology, to propose a definition of *community*. However, the anthropological understanding is problematic in that it conceives of cultures “as discrete object-like phenomenon” (Gupta and Ferguson, 2001) which has led to the conception of community as a stabilized place where a single culture resides. In the work described within these case studies, however, the identification of community and the creation of community stand as a collective endeavor. Community emerges from a weaving of shared socio-political circumstances, shared place, shared time, and shared communications. It is not a monolith of homogenous individuals, but an intersection of geography, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, sexuality, disability, etc.

I turn to critical race and post-colonial theories to further interrogate the notion of culture and to understand the labels often assigned to communities as sites of engaged art-making: marginalized, pathology, high risk, impoverished, disenfranchised, and underserved. All these labels are predicated upon an established order, including its respective institutions defining these social groups in deficit. Reinforced by this theoretical engagement, art interventions would better serve their respective goals through a direct confrontation of inequity in process design and art product. Fields, which enter community-based contexts, e.g., art, health, social services, and education often define community groups as lacking and in need, which is commonly taken for granted. In plain terms, fixing or providing temporary relief from that need becomes a common focus among community-based artists. Critical race theory and post-colonial theory challenges the notion that People of Color do not succeed because of a lack of either the skill or knowledge necessary for social mobility. Instead, critical race theory helps create a critique of

existing institutions and subverts the often-overlooked notion that the social situation is a stable and natural frame of reference. The scholar and artist becomes better prepared to investigate the use of paradigms that would define engaged communities as *high risk, disenfranchised, or marginalized*.

Geography is the foundation of “community” definitions. The tendency is to rely on geographic delineations as a path to understanding community. This is an academic precedent established from within the field of anthropology. However, anthropology’s legacy in defining the influence of space reflects, what Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson define as the “isomorphism of space, place, and culture” (2001) that has resulted in several obstacles to understanding community. It has led first to the notion that communities are discretely segregated, cloistered, culturally conservative, and homogenous. This misconception has served to enable much confusion and ignorance of communities with complex identity relationships between immigration, nationality, class, gender, and sexuality.

This paradigm does not account for the cultural differences experienced in geographic and figurative spaces, emerging from dislocation—what are commonly defined as “the borderlands” or “hybridized.” This obscuring such complicated notions of community leads to a simplistic understanding of how identity is, indeed, influenced by place. Social change and cultural transformation is situated within interconnected spaces and allows us to bring forth the premise that community space has always been hierarchically interconnected. Understanding the terms of connection that tie together a multiplicity of differences is vital to understand community. At heart, is understanding that interconnection across difference is a fundamental aspect of community. Geographic communities are formed and transformed by the interconnectedness of the space they have always shared and are not discrete bodies, but

overlapping and morphing spaces. Anthropology, as a discipline, in its own history has attempted to redeem itself from a once evolutionary, accumulative conception of culture, which contributed to the representation of cultures and communities of color as monolithic and static. However, new attention to representation has led to nuancing these practices to actively resist objectivist approaches and “other”-ing.

Community is a dynamic process occurring in a space, which is continuous, connected, complicated, historical, and paved by economic and political relations. In a socially and spatially interconnected world, the tendency is to rely on conceptions of “cultures” that assumes uniformity and unity. Post-colonial analysis, such as Gupta’s and Ferguson’s brings the colonial process into relief and exposes how social resources within communities of color are generally unrecognized by an outside perspective, which is how the notion that these communities are homogenous has persevered. Generally, communities can be characterized by having wide networks of social relations. This is a better framework to conceptualize cultural difference in a region. Political and economic relations link people, the colonial period blurred from history the presence of wide networks, consequently the image of others is that they are resistant to change and static. The key points are that difference is produced within a common shared and connected space; Common, shared, and connected space, through a historical process, produces a set of relations that also constructs difference. Power is better interrogated in this model as a component *within* the wide networks of social (and power) relations as opposed to a force external to these social relations. Such a conception of power opens the possibilities of understanding the complexity of community by switching the conventional manner of thinking about the relations of culture, power, and space.

Finally, I will use Jan Cohen-Cruz’s four principles of community-based practice, a

communal context, reciprocity, hyphenation, and active culture. A communal context speaks to the notion that the “artist’s craft and vision are at the service of a specific group desire” (2005, 91). The second, reciprocity, “is the desire for the relationship between community-based artists and participants to be a mutually nourishing one” (2005, 93). Third, “community-based [art] is hyphenated in consisting of multiple disciplines” (2005, 97). Finally, community-based is marked by “the principle of active culture [which] reflects the recognition that people frequently get more out of making art than seeing the fruits of other’s labors” (2005, 99). These principles establish the terms and conditions for artists’ engagements with community. These unequivocally require artists to be in service to a community goal or issue; understand the influence of power to create relationships based on mutuality; be open to collaboration with multiple disciplines to properly serve community; and recognize the significance of creating opportunities for people to make art, not merely appreciate what others have created. I will also posit key terms considering the same concepts to complement this model. These key terms will add a level of critical structural analysis in the consideration to further argue for the importance of community-based practice: *standards of art value, socio-historical context, media representation, institutional power, critical self-reflection, conscious community, and identity.*

Critical Pedagogy

This dissertation will draw a clear distinction between community-based art practices and school-based arts instruction. Although both engage with the arts and with youth, arts education often rests on conventional and standardized models of educational pedagogy. As part of a standardized curriculum, conventional arts classes are paradigmatically designed in a manner befitting that model. Critical pedagogy scholars have been severely critical of conventional

educational models reflected in a robust body of literature. Critique focuses on the neglect of education to teach the tools necessary to analyze power, bias, identity, and is particularly severe regarding the lack of standardized approaches to explore the presence of these concepts in art collaboration and production. Instead, I focus on practices outside of standard pedagogical systems, beginning with Paolo Freire, the foremost scholar and influence, in the development of critical pedagogy.

Freire's notion of liberatory dialogic education grounds itself in challenging the standard western model that frames students as lacking the necessary knowledge and skill they will require in their lives, which can then only be taught by experts in this specific educational system. Freire famously describes this as the "banking" paradigm, in which people are empty vessels that need to be filled with the approved knowledge granted by the ruling class. Knowledge is fed in, like money to the bank, and is withdrawn as needed on tests (Freire, 1976). In this paradigm, those at the top of the hierarchy are defined as powerful, intelligent, and capable. The people through this process are simultaneously cultivated to internalize a dependency upon the ruling intelligentsia, who are framed as entitled to be culture makers while the lower classes are exploitable objects and consumers of cultural processes. Freire's mission as an educator was focused on working with the working classes of Brazil to improve literacy levels for the express purpose of accessing political power. Through Freire's notion of liberatory dialogic education, people can better realize their role as political agents and culture makers – which is foreclosed by the banking model where people are restricted to join the ranks of consumerism. With the shift to liberatory education, the peoples' consciousness raises their potential as culture makers and their ability to change their social positions. With Freire's pedagogy, "the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit

themselves to its transformation” (1970). This is the first step. In the second step, Freire explains the praxis takes root and grows from “a pedagogy of the oppressed” to “a pedagogy of all.”

Critical pedagogy, in order to foster critical consciousness, therefore, defines education as a mutual process where the critical educator’s role is to 1) pose problems to students; 2) structure opportunities for students to identify social problems; 3) analyze those problems; 4) lead the students in the process of creating a plan of action to address the identified problem; 5) implement the plan of action; and finally 6) follow up with leading a deep reflection on the analysis and evaluation of the action plan. The key component of Freirean critical pedagogy is the explicit obligation of educators and cultural workers to assist the masses in realizing their positions as active culture makers, not passive consumers. Critical consciousness is emphasized simultaneous to culture as a project of creating social change. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* proposes the use of authority in the classroom, the potential structures of liberatory education, the distinction between facilitating and teaching and the rigor of critical literacy principles, asserting that through this practice the marginalized can “unveil the world of oppression and [...] commit themselves to its transformation” (Freire, 1970).

The foundational principle of his work is that for true learning to take place, the educator or the cultural worker must be committed to engage in the subversive act of providing opportunities for the oppressed to build critical consciousness. With this, Freire proposes a new responsibility for intellectuals and art practitioners to be critically resistant to dominant discourses. This challenge is particularly salient in the context of creating activist art with youth. It first requires that artists be aware of dominant discourses and develop a deep sensitivity to them in a manner that helps identify the discourses operating in specific collaborations. Freire is

known as the premier activist scholar who led the way for these shifts in conventional methods of education and is cited by several prominent scholars who take up various elements of his work. There are two, specifically that I would like to highlight here. These scholars further nuance the Freirean imperative to developing critical consciousness and offer specific pedagogical ideologies to support educators on their own path to developing critical consciousness.

Namely, bell hooks and Peter MacLaren assume the activist sensibility of Freire's work. hooks explores the notion of teaching as a performative act, which assumes this challenge to recapitulating hierarchized power. Framing teaching art as a performance is fruitful for scaffolding community-based arts pedagogy. In this conception of teaching youth activism, performative teaching frames the classroom as a dynamic space where all participants must be flexible and adaptive to create a reciprocal relationship. Conceptualizing teaching as performative catalyzes all involved in the reciprocal relationship to maintain the intensity of engagement. Hooks's further argues that critical education is a practice of freedom that necessitates the "belie[f] that [teaching] is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual [...] growth of [...] students" (hooks, 1994). Her notion of "engaged" pedagogy is rooted in the passionate insistence that the individual's capacity to think critically is not determined by one's class, race, gender, or social standing. Peter MacLaren, a revolutionary post-Marxist, argues that pedagogy should fall along a spectrum of dialectical reasoning. For McLaren, education should be about becoming "conscious of and transcending the limits in which we can make ourselves" (MacLaren, 2011). Therefore, educators' missions must necessarily expect to engage at a deeply critical level with the existing order or expect to see that

negligence “will return our efforts back to us as a symptom on another level and in another form” (MacLaren, 2011).

Articulating community-based arts practice with critical pedagogy and critical race theory leads to several imperatives: critical thinking skills, communication skills, critical aesthetic literacy, political agency, and training. In the interest of developing rigorous goals, engaged artists must train and develop practical skills when discussing positionality, dialogue, intersectionality, critical self-reflection, and the politics of aesthetics. Developing criticality as a measure of art training helps establish a common vocabulary, sensibility, and conceptualization of a complicated process, which in turn assists in defining expectations for everyone’s role and for the micro dynamics of the overall process. Priorities of training can be borrowed from the typical tenets of critical pedagogy. With Freirean training, there is an emphasis on ethics, preparation, and process. The emphasis underscores the complicated character of Freirean methodology and the difficulty innate to its implementation. The principal conceit of critical pedagogy scholarship, is that engaged practiced should focus on personal development, particularly when the goal is community-building and organizing on social justice issues.

Developing the individual is the most effective way to build community within a system of injustice. For radical and critical pedagogical scholars, the major project of pedagogical activism focuses this goal. In this paradigm, the goal is to increase political agency, individually and among the collective. Engaged pedagogy and, we can extrapolate, engaged art-making have the capacity and the obligation to address the development of individual agency first. With critical pedagogy, art-making pedagogies have the capacity to address the development of individual agency as an aspect of the art-making. Such practice is especially vital when arts projects intend to challenge recapitulations of unbalanced power relations, as manifested when

discussing such issues as bias, bullying, social, and educational inequality, HIV prevention, and domestic violence prevention.

Media Studies: Film Theory and Critical Media Literacy

Working with youth in an urban landscape requires that artist mentors understand the influence of popular media on a general sense of self. In every project that I have collaborated with, the youth participants draw from the art forms that they have been exposed to, regardless of the medium of engagement within a project. Therefore, it is vital to discuss and negotiate with youth a shared set of collective values regarding their aesthetic choices because not doing so can potentially foreclose the development of their individuality and imagination in that the very act of making art becomes an act of framing their experience, their identity, and their community as a negation (Alvarado and Ferguson, 1983). Furthermore, it is imperative that pedagogical strategies for arts engagement both challenge this negation, as well as affirm the experience of youth of color. The methodology—the “*how*” of teaching urban youth of color and the “*what*” of art that they are taught—have powerful effects on how urban youth understand the aesthetics of their experiences and, by extension, themselves.

The importance of critical media engagement is well established. Gordon Berry’s media research explains that media industries maintain a significant relationship with youth of color, narrowly casting youth of color as market consumers, not producers of popular media. While mainstream media outlets in the United States actively court young Black and Latino consumers, however, representations of race and class stereotypes escalate simultaneously (Shohat and Stam, 1994). Mainstream media industries aggressively pursue teens of color producing a troublesome dynamic where youth of color are indoctrinated into being consumers of mainstream images

which appropriate urban style and sensibilities, yet evacuate any complex representation of urban youth experience (Levine, 2007).

As discussed earlier, critical pedagogy addresses power in conventional systems of education. In the development of the arguments in this dissertation, I will lean upon both critical pedagogy as well as critical media literacy (CML) to analyze the interpersonal and pedagogical structures utilized within collaborative process. The body of CML literature has built upon the critical pedagogy framework to develop a theory of and educational strategies for interrogating popular images and media content in the global west. Additionally, the theoretical project of this scholarship weaves notions of decentralizing power, institutional critique, and challenging elite aesthetics while engaging in practical art-making.

Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, the foremost scholars of critical media literacy, define popular media as a public pedagogy where popular media, broadcasting, on-line content, and new media are the most powerful socializing forces in contemporary U.S. society. Popular media is an efficient system of distributing information and upholding hegemonic epistemes because the social elite maintains control. They, with that control, create a network of “information, ideas and values” (Kellner and Share, 2009), recapitulating hegemonic ideals. Kellner and Share explain that this system places technology, media, and society in a triumvirate, with each exerting equal influence over the others. This imbalanced power structure, according to the authors, underscores the importance of critical medial literacy. Therefore, the primary project of critical media literacy is to decentralize power utilizing two strategies: 1) CML focuses on “empower[ing] students and citizens to adequately read media messages” (Kellner and Share, 2009); and 2) CML emphasizes the importance of students learning practical skills and developing competence in creating new media content.

Kellner and Share charge educational systems with the responsibility of implementing curricular innovations to address the manner in which youth are educated and socialized by popular media. This challenge is important for all community-based artists who engage directly with youth, especially considering the twenty-first century surge of internet and digital media technologies and content. Necessarily, this involves utilizing “pedagogies that provide media literacy and enable students, teachers, and citizens to discern the nature and effects of media culture” (Kellner and Share, 2009). The development of critical thinking is a key component to the development of educational strategies that will reveal how popular media hide their operations, create a false sense of reality, and affect social conditions.

Kellner and Share contemplate the broad definition of literacy based on this rationale, in order to place media literacy within a broader category of educational approaches, recognize that there are many forms of literacies that stretch the conventional notion of literacy as simply referring to a competence with traditional print genres. In their conception, literacy means having an effective competency in “learning and using socially constructed forms of communication and representation” (Kellner and Share, 2009). Thus, pedagogical strategies for developing literacies must include training students to investigate the “institutional discourses and practices” (Kellner and Share, 2009) latent in popular media. Kellner and Share argue that the educational system should assist students in understanding the historical and cultural legacies that exist within its cultural production, particularly mainstream media. Student learning must focus on “the skills and knowledge to read, interpret, and produce [...] texts and artifacts [so that they] gain the intellectual tools and capacities to fully participate in one’s culture and society” (Kellner and Share, 2009). The significance of students using these forms, to discern meaning when the significance is purposely obscured, is an extension of the individual’s development and

ability to actively engage in a democracy. As a pedagogy, CML can enhance the potential of art education frameworks, both formal and community-based, to engage with the “critical [...] analy[sis] of relationships between media and audiences, information and power” (Kellner and Share, 2009). As a method toward meeting this objective, critical medial literacy necessarily involves building skills to decipher the messages within media content.

Literacies and technologies are in constant interplay with social and cultural shifts, particularly the interest of the dominant classes. Kellner’s and Share’s definition of CML is part of an overall project of radical democracy where they conceive of an educational system invested in democratizing all aspects of society and challenging hegemony. In this vein, CML prioritizes the cultivation of skills for reading, interpreting, and producing new media. Kellner and Share posit that this begins with building analytical skills in deciphering “media codes and conventions, [...] criticizing stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and developing competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts” (2009, 4). Therefore, a comprehensive approach is required to help students learn the methods of distinguishing and measuring the content within popular culture forms and applying critical thinking to the effects and the functions of that media. Finally, their approach stipulates that students must engage in “using media intelligently [...] and construct[ing] alternative media” (2009, 4).

Kellner and Share offer this approach as a necessary shift to general education models, not just for media instruction. Their argument is that their model of critical media literacy is a pedagogical prototype to challenge the structural inequalities within the U.S. educational system. I agree with this assertion and, therefore, cite them centrally in this dissertation. The critical media literacy framework offers specific strategies and methods to develop critical thinking

skills youth can utilize to navigate media and, moreover, their broader social experiences.

Indeed, the Kellner and Share approach fortifies the development of critical thinking in such a way that such training can have ramifications in multiple spheres of experience and is, therefore, an invaluable template for the development of criticality in other arts pedagogies.

Empowerment Theory for Arts-Based Interventions

I include empowerment literature from several fields of health and social sciences in support of the common goals of community-based art-making practice with youth, emphasizing individual and social change goals. The connections between art pedagogy and empowerment processes have been under-theorized in both community-based arts and social sciences. However, several theorists in this area have drawn productively from Freire in recent decades. Program planning of community-based projects often includes the expectation of meeting particularized goals, such as health promotion, arts education, literacy, personal development, or social change. Although these potential goals vary in scope and direction, the goals in adolescent project design require that the young people involved add, end, or modify aspects of their thinking, behavior, or affects as a result of their participation. There have been several moves to integrate practice across these disciplines, however, the literature does not reflect a deep cross-disciplinary analysis of the connections among art-making, pedagogy, and empowerment processes within participatory art-based youth projects. Interrogating the elements of arts participation in arts-based youth projects will assist in identifying the elements within the many layers of art-making practice and collaboration that catalyze change. Cross-referencing these literatures with those already discussed is useful for re-imagining definitions of efficacy and assessment in community-based projects.

The cross-disciplinary efforts to define empowerment and define change processes on individual and community levels in intervention work originate from the following subfields of human sciences: psychological empowerment; community organizing & mobilization as empowerment; and economic development:

Psychological Empowerment: Marc Zimmerman, Barbara Israel, Amy Schulz, and Barry Checkoway lead the literature on psychological empowerment. They define individual empowerment through a synthesis of other theoretical work as a “process by which individuals gain mastery and control over their lives, and the development of a critical understanding of their environment” (Zimmerman et al, 1992). Mastery and control in this model then results in a sense of self-efficacy and motivation to exertion of control, and self-perceived competence. This includes three components to empowerment: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral.

The behavioral component of psychological empowerment can be explained by the acute actions that are taken to influence one’s social and political environment. This usually occurs through involvement with neighborhood associations, religious groups, community organizations, political groups, self-help groups, and service organizations. The behavioral component includes assisting others in community related activities, in particular, with issues that are not personally relevant. Although the research on the interactional level is incomplete, Zimmerman, et al, hypothesize that it is a lynchpin construct of psychological empowerment. The research would seem to suggest connections to self-perceptions about control (a key element to the intrapersonal component) with the actions one takes to exert influence (a key to the behavioral component) over known resources. The interactional level refers to the transactions between persons and environments that enable one to successfully master social or political systems. It includes knowledge about the resources needed to achieve goals, “understanding

causal agents, a critical awareness of one's environment, and the development of decision-making and problem-solving skills necessary to actively engage one's environment”

(Zimmerman et al, 1992).

The intrapersonal level refers to how people think about their capacity to influence social and political systems important to them. This includes self-perception of “control, self-efficacy, motivation to exert control, and perceived competence” (Zimmerman et al, 1992) over specific areas. This level also extends to include perception of control over issues concerning a broader community and to effect change in social and political systems.

Community Health: Theorizing community empowerment from the field of community health education has been heavily influenced by the work of Nina Wallerstein and Edward Bernstein. They define empowerment as a “social action process in which individuals and groups begin to act to gain mastery over their lives in the context of changing their social and political environment” (Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1994). Wallerstein and Bernstein come from the field of public health and theorize community health education as rooted in notions of community empowerment. They propose that community health education necessarily promotes “health in all personal and social arenas” (Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1994). Their model is based on Freire’s empowerment education theory, which suggests that participation in group efforts toward group-defined goals increases people’s sense of control over their own lives. Tandem with this is the notion that people must participate in identifying the issues to be addressed, and must engage in dialogic processes to “critically assess social and historical roots of problems” (Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1994) in order to best envision strategies for lasting individual and community change. According to Wallerstein and Bernstein: “An empowering health education effort therefore involves much more than improving self-esteem, self-efficacy or other health

behaviors that are independent from environmental or community change; the targets are individual, group and structural change” (Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1994). Therefore, empowerment in this model is an extensive process that includes prevention efforts as well as community “connectedness, self-development, improved quality of life, and social justice” (Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1994).

Community Mobilization: Freire also influences Judith McFarlane’s and John Fehir’s work from the field of community mobilization. They explain empowerment as both a personal and community process. Personal empowerment is defined as an increase in individual self-esteem and power, while community empowerment is defined as a collective enhancement of self-esteem, sense of power, and sustainable economy. McFarlane and Fehir theorize that the work of organizing community toward social justice goals creates individualized empowerment. These increases happen as a consequence of the work done toward organizing a community toward a social justice project, particularly when that work requires individuals to assert themselves in a manner they were not in the practice of prior to joining an organized effort.

Collective Identity Mobilization: Toorjo Ghose and his colleagues articulate the notion of collective identity with behavior change. They build on Taylor and Whittier’s notion of collective identity mobilization as “(1) the formation of boundaries differentiating movement actors from outsiders, (2) the establishment of consciousness that infuses meaning into group identification, and (3) the negotiation of identity where it is made visible and politicized to the outside world” (Ghose, et al, 2008).

The Ghose group utilizes a *boundaries/consciousness/negotiation* (BCN) model, which is also borrowed from Taylor and Whittier. In this model, the term “boundaries” refers to

participants building a sense of cohesion and group identity through active engagement in working toward a mutual goal. This goal is rooted in opposing “institutions and societal processes outside the group” (Ghose, et al, 2008). Boundaries of the in-group evolve from the shared values, which emerge from taking on projects together against a dominant outside group. Consciousness arises in this model when movement actors attach “meaning to their group affiliation and collective action” (Ghose, et al, 2008). To elaborate, meaning is further made when social movement actors “draw on collective action frames or meaning schema that 1) perform a punctuating role by ‘underscoring the injustice of a social situation’ and 2) articulate a narrative that constitutes a liberating interpretive framework” (Ghose, et al, 2008). Although, this function addresses social concerns, personal narratives—as the mechanisms through which society is experienced—are articulated in this process and done so with a new critical consciousness.

The last component, negotiation, refers to the political articulation of newly developed individual and collective identities to outsiders of the in-group. There are two manners in which this can happen. First is through expressive communication with “receptive outsiders and possible allies through education, performance and mobilization” (Ghose, et al, 2008). Second, is through “oppositional negotiation” (Ghose, et al, 2008) as a process by which individual or group identity is expressed against negative outside attitudes and stigma. Ghose, et al’s research helps us to understand the importance of social capital in the development of community empowerment strategies and the connections across aspects of relational social capital such as “community-level cohesiveness, engagement and consciousness” (Ghose, et al, 2008). Just as building material capacity results in a cache of resources for a community, collective identity (CI) leads to the establishment of a symbolic, discursive, and relational reservoir that increases

community empowerment. Anchored in the framework of the BCN model, CI allows us to sift through the analytical complexity of relational social capital and identify the manner in which it is harnessed in order to boost empowerment.

Economic Development: The collection of literature reflects the efforts to identify indicators of empowerment, which can then be used to develop tools to measure the impact that interventions have upon the agency of an individual. Naila Kabeer offers a meta-analysis of strategies utilized to measure empowerment among women where “empowerment is about the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability” (Kabeer, 2002). Acts of exerting choice or decision-making reflect the individual’s ability to synthesize *resources*, *personal agency*, and the *consequences* of choice. She defines resources “broadly to include not only access, but also future claims, to both material and human social resources;” agency “includ[es] processes of decision-making, as well as less measurable manifestations of agency such as negotiation, deception and manipulation;” and *consequences* are configured as outcomes reflecting the “well-being” (Kabeer, 2002) of the individual. *Choice*, she adds is “further qualified by referring to the conditions of choice, its content and consequences. These qualifications represent an attempt to incorporate the structural parameters of individual choice” (Kabeer, 2002).

Kabeer’s emphasis on the structural limits of individual choice align with the paradigms of analysis presented within the fields of critical pedagogy and critical media literacy, as well as critical race theory, which I will rely on heavily in the following chapters. Her analysis also emphasizes the “interdependence of individual and structural change” (Kabeer, 2002) in the development of empowerment. Following this model, the analysis in the succeeding chapters will challenge the notions of power that create the social conditions of structural oppression, and

the operations of power within the pedagogical processes within these case studies.

METHODOLOGIES: CRITICAL INTERDISCIPLINARITY

I have developed my research design, methodology, and process with the primary goal of creating a framework that echoes the values and ideals that I have learned during my community arts practice from the community of practitioners with whom I have collaborated. The work of this dissertation relies on several branches of scholarship in the effort to further nuance the theoretical understanding of the complicated dynamics that converge in community-based art-making practice with urban youth. I advocate for a cross-disciplinary discourse in building this deeper understanding of the mechanisms that contribute to identity and community-making in order to fully develop the immense potential of collaborative art-making. Such practice is an intricate system of micro-dynamic *pedagogy*.

In isolation, the branches of theory that I draw from contribute to independent bodies of literature addressing art, power, identity, personal empowerment, and community-building. The common thread across all of these is criticality, defined as engaging with a critical structural analysis. Despite the early history of political advocacy and cultural celebration, that is part of U.S. community-based arts intervention practice, this field has expanded and political aims are less often part of the goals. In an increasingly polarized political landscape, notions of political activism, structural bias, power, social justice, and community have slipped from particularized significance into abstracted, Universalist vagueness. Early community-based practice arose out of immediate sociopolitical situations and the artists involved were immediately and directly affected by the circumstances. Therefore, they had a unique and specific perspective on the issues and on how to create work for and/or with community that was meaningful to the

community. As the field has grown, so has the distance between artists in community-building practice and the communities that serve as sites for engagement. What is increasingly absent in practice is the knowledge of experience and an appreciation for the insight this brings, of how difference can become an obstacle for the full potential of a project—and those community members participating in it—to be achieved.

Critical Feminist Ethnography

Critical feminist ethnography interviews and oral history are the primary methods for reconstructing the histories of the projects examined in this study. One of the key requirements of this interviewing practice is that the interchange be constructed equitably. As the person who is initiating the meeting, it was my responsibility to facilitate such an exchange. I relied on the knowledge and the rapport that I had developed prior to adding ethnographic researcher to my list of roles in practice. In that sense, I began the research for this dissertation many years ago and with a great advantage. When I notified my former colleagues of this project, they did not hesitate to offer me access to their project files. Therefore, I had access to both my personal archive as well as those of my colleagues. The other advantage that I do not take for granted is that since collaborating on Project ABLE, STAHR!, and Will Power To Youth, I have remained in contact with the people who had been involved. I continue to be in active practice, thus I have had several colleagues and youth mentees to invite into this discussion.

Oral History Interviewing: Oral history interviews give the narrator the opportunity to tell a story on her or his own terms. Those who have been marginalized have often been muted and can speak from their own perspective, as well as the one influenced by the dominant position of a given culture. These terms complicate the process of listening for the interviewer, for she or he

needs to be sensitive to the relationship between these two perspectives as they arise during the interview process and tune in to “both the dominant and muted channels clearly” (Anderson and Jack, 2005, 157). This requires the interviewer to be self-aware and actively attendant to his or her response when conducting interviews. In my research, I was conscientious of not allowing myself to assume a response, to assume the full meaning of a response, or to assume the completion of a thought.

Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack offer three important suggestions for maintaining this sophisticated practice of listening: 1) listen for moral language; 2) listen to the voice of the subject attending to the subject’s meta-statements, to avoid preconceptions; and 3) listen attending to the logic of the narrative. Listening for moral language assists the interviewer to develop a sense of the individual’s concept of self against the cultural norm. This allows for a pointed focus on personal values and their contrast to the cultural expectations placed upon the individual. Meta-statements, as mentioned in the second suggestion above, are the commentaries that people make regarding their experience of responding to questions, and their evaluation of those responses. Listening for the logic of the narrative is important for discerning the meaning of how the social role of the subject’s position is constructed to provide broader context.

Many of the initial informants I contacted happened to be people with whom I had remained in contact with since our first experiences with the various projects (Project ABLE, STAHR!, Will Power to Youth). These individuals were still living in Los Angeles so, without huge effort, we were able to schedule time to discuss their memories of the respective programs. The initial phone calls revealed the importance of contacting other individuals whom I had not known, but who had nonetheless been essential in the development of the program. For each project, I contacted those I knew and, through them, learned of other people who would have

important information. Then I followed up by making contact with those individuals. When it was possible, I sat for in-person interviews. Several individuals who were once involved with the evolution of Project ABLE and STAHR! had moved out of the state, however, so we talked on the phone as I collected their information.

Each phase of interviews was strategically focused on adding specific layers to the picture of each project. The first round of interviews assisted in historicizing each respective project. Second interviews were more often focused on clarifying original points or facts that were shared during the initial interviews. Third interviews were most often focused on details specific to the individual's perspective/position with the project. Youth participant alumni of the programs were interviewed with a singular focus on their impressions of individuals and their experiences with the program during their participation. At the end of initial interviews, I asked youth alumni to reflect on what influence, if any, their participation in the program had upon them.

The interviews I conducted in person were audio recorded, accompanied by my detailed note-taking during the conversation. I conducted eight interviews. Of these, I was able to record five. I did not record three interviews, as these were with old colleagues that had also been close friends and our conversations slipped between the personal, as we had not spoken directly in a few years, and the official subject at hand. During formal interviews, with individuals that I had not had a personal friendship with, there was no problem recording. Therefore, with those whom I had been a friend, I took detailed notes as I listened, paused the note-taking as we ventured into personal terrain and resumed when we returned to the official subject.

I immediately documented my thoughts and lingering questions following each interview. I repeated the process the following day. In the subsequent days, I would sit and

transcribe the audio recordings from in-person interviews. At the beginning of each interview, and again as I closed with each person, I explained how I would like to follow up with them on this project. I would send early drafts of my writing about the programs they were discussing with me. At that time, I asked each person to review the material and reply directly to the text. This process has varied depending on the individual. Some people are more prone to write and, for those individuals, I accepted their written replies. For others, the writing process was not as comfortable for them, so we relied on direct verbal communication.

Prior to conducting interviews, I first sat down to write my own recollections of the projects. I focused on developing a timeline based on my memories as an initial template of each program. Collecting my thoughts prior to each set of interviews assisted me in developing a set of questions for my interviewees. It also offered an opportunity for me to be transparent about my own experience with the program, thereby initiating the dialogic exchange in the development of the dissertation that I desired to establish. When my collaborators were cloudy on their memories, I shared what I remembered. I had a cache of my own recollections to share and respective impressions to solicit their contrasting memories of the projects. In conversation, we worked our way back through the years to help each other create a full picture of the project history. Many times a collaborator was present during earlier points in a project history, prior to my becoming involved. On those occasions, the interviewee offered to help me get in touch with a new potential informant I had not previously known.

There were several occasions during interviews when collaborators offered to put me in touch with someone or eagerly suggested that I connect with someone who they believed would have insight that I would be interested in. The individuals that I did follow up with were decided upon based on whether they could help illustrate the evolution of a project. I was most interested

in developing a sense of what the social and historical conditions were that inspired the design and goals of a project and how these conditions influenced the artistic elements of the project. As mentioned above, the interview questions that I designed for informants were influenced by their roles in each project, i.e., teaching artist, administrator, consultant, adult staff, youth staff, and youth participant.

Critical Ethnography: Soyini Madison asserts there are five central questions to critical ethnography. The relevance of these questions is also the reason that I relied on critical ethnography to structure my study. Madison's central questions are: "1) How do we reflect upon and evaluate our own purpose, intentions, and frames of analysis as researchers?; 2) How do we predict consequences or evaluate our own potential to do harm?; 3) How do we create and maintain a dialogue of collaboration in our research projects between ourselves and others?; 4) How is the specificity of the local story relevant to the broader meanings and operations of the human condition?; 5) How—in what location or through what intervention—will our work make the greatest contribution to equity, freedom, and justice" (Madison, 2005)?

Self-reflexive practice must lead the researcher to certain questions that challenge conventional understandings of the proprietorship of academic ethnographic research. Madison states them as: "What are we going to do with the research and who ultimately will benefit? Who gives us the authority to make claims about where we have been? How will our work make a difference in people's lives?" These questions challenge the conventional understanding of the researcher as objective and entitled to own the knowledge that is collected from the research subjects. Further, Madison's questions propose that the research must necessarily benefit the subjects of research and that the ethnography must be part of a greater effort toward achieving social justice for the studied culture.

These questions force ethnographic researchers to contend with their own positionality. It is fundamentally important that artists and other adult collaborators working with youth understand their own positionality and the relationships to privilege and power that are inherently granted to that position. Critical feminist ethnographic method holds this concern, particularly with engaged communities, at the center of research. Madison's central questions assist with the development of a meta-framework for the ethnographic work in the field. I argue the above questions reflect fundamental principles to engaged work that will either block or amplify the potential impact any art intervention can have upon urban youth populations.

To expound on those considerations of field work, Michelle Fine suggests three positionalities that the ethnographer can hold in research. These are 1) the ventriloquist who lacks a political or rhetorical stance and merely "transmits" information in the attempt to assume neutrality; 2) The "positionality of voices" is where the subjects themselves are the focus, and their voices carry forward indigenous meanings and experiences that are in opposition to dominant discourses and practices. The position of the ethnographer is vaguely present but not addressed; 3) The activism stance in which the ethnographer takes a clear position in intervening on hegemonic practices and serves as an advocate in exposing the material effects of marginalized locations while offering alternatives. In this dissertation, I have striven to adopt the activist approach, in my own effort to be transparent about my political agenda and its relationship to my understanding of the structural issues limiting access to art resources among working classes, youth, and communities of color.

Four Seasons of Ethnography: María Cristina González's *Four Seasons of Ethnography* has been the greatest influence on the methods I have leaned on to reconcile my position as a member of the communities that I present in this study. The ideological strategies I have participated in,

represented in this study, can be deeply understood when approached with the ontological arguments of González's approach. There are four guiding principles to the *Four Seasons*, which González has developed as a direct challenge to principles she has found in the conventional model of ethnography. She refers to the conventional model where the ethnographer is framed as culturally foreign to the community subjects, reflecting an ontological frame that shapes methodology, interpretation, and representation.

The conventional ideals of ethnography she writes against are 1) *opportunism*, 2) *independence of researcher*, 3) *entitlement*, and 4) *primacy of rationality*. Opportunism is rooted in a linear and material orientation that leads to formalist priorities. Linearity of time leads to the cultural value that opportunities must be taken advantage of because they are one-time occurrences and are not likely to be repeated. Inherent in this is also the cultural values of action-oriented approaches and reward-driven justifications for these approaches. The integrity and ethics of the data is less important than the action taken to ensure it is gathered. Second, the independence of researcher challenges reflects the accepted belief the researcher is naturally separate from what is being studied. González indicates the predominance of literature in the field framing researchers' relationships to community members as compromises to their intellectual and scholarly independence. She argues that this reveals what is at issue, an epistemological system that "unitizes the world and believes that somehow the separation of entities allows manipulation of one by another" (González, 2000) which is opposed to understanding the innate interdependence of entities. The underlying assumption is that complete separation from research subjects is integral to the proper execution of research.

Third, entitlement as a conventional ideal builds on the notion of the independent researcher by framing ethnographic research as a practice of putting the "researcher in contact

with culture” (González, 2000). This underscores a latent notion left over from colonialism, which naturalizes the experience of the researcher and therefore positions the individual as outside of any cultural context (González, 2000). In this paradigm, social hierarchy is taken for granted and notions of self place the researcher in a dominant relationship to the exterior world. Effectively, this means 1) the researcher’s desire is the only justification required to enter into a community for data collection; and 2) the researcher is granted priority within the relationships that are built with community members in the process of gathering information, which becomes the sole property of the researcher. Finally, the fourth ideal generally asserts a dualistic understanding of human experience, a clean split between the intellectual, and the emotional. This cultural value demeans experience and privileges the intellectual (academic) interpretation of that corporeal experience. Basic to this entire framework, is a rational, individualistic bias, which is repeated throughout these five conventional ideals.

González rejects this conventional framework and offers the *Four Seasons of Ethnography*. Her set of principle ideals reflect the values of a circular ontology that challenges the researcher as independent of culture model, which poses a problem for researchers that share aspects of their identity with the subjects of their research. The four principles in this paradigm are 1) natural cycles (appropriateness); 2) interdependence of all things (awareness); 3) preparedness; and 4) harmony/balance (discipline). First, appropriateness as principle is a cyclical orientation to living experience, where living phenomenon is oriented to a “circular process of preparation, growth, harvest, and rest” (González, 2000). This continuous movement happens cyclically, “without a fixed point” (González, 2000). Within this ontological perspective, the circular order is inevitable and layered. Within a circular order and in a patterned rhythm, neither time nor opportunity can be “lost” as they are conventionally

understood. Most importantly, this speaks to the importance of the researcher developing a nuanced sensitivity to both seasonal and interpersonal cues and defining appropriateness. The second principle of *Four Seasons* is the interdependence of all things or awareness. This makes transparent the arbitrary constructed-ness of boundaries: that they are constructed for the sake of imposing a particular order on social experience. All experience is understood as part of the whole process of participating and understanding culture. González explains that this brings the awareness of what is lost to our understanding when boundaries are reified. Ethnographers operating within this circular ontology understand that objectivity is not possible as it is predicated upon separating the researcher's experience from the community subject – contrary to assertions of the conventional model.

The third principle is preparedness—the emphasis on heightened personal awareness and the practice of reflection. Personal and experiential content must be given rich descriptions as context for one's findings in written research and as a recognized part of making meaning within the study itself. In this paradigm, the researcher prepares for research through developing a personal practice of critical self-reflection. Honest and sincere reporting of the content, including one's attitudes and feelings as inherent to the study, requires a deep reflection that enables a dialogic exchange of understanding between researcher and participant. It expands the relationship between researchers and participants, creating a dialectical mechanism for participants to offer their observations to researchers. The fourth guiding ideal is harmony and balance. What arises from the accumulation of the previous three ideals is that all experience is interconnected. Rational interpretation of experience, in contrast to the received paradigm of ethnography, is not privileged above the spiritual, affective, emotional, and material levels of experience. Taken together, the *Four Seasons* is something that González calls “a paradigm of

paradoxical tentativeness relying heavily on the human instrument of the academic ethnographer (González, 2000). Necessarily, the human instrument is part of a highly intuitive discipline, which takes for granted introspection, critical self-reflection, sincerity, honesty, competence, and rigor as fundamentals of methodology. In addition, an ethnographer within this ontology must possess these characteristics in order to achieve the next layer of fundamentals within the circular paradigm, which is accepting and processing feedback for one's work.

I find this paradigm inspirational and have adopted it as a methodological foundation because of the challenge it offers to the conventional model of ethnography. I am a Chicana scholar, conducting research in geographic and professional communities that I hold membership within. As I have undergone my own academic training, I have found it difficult to reconcile the intellectual distance that I am trained to maintain from my research. I have relied on González's methodology to help me reconcile and report my emotional experience of the research process. Further, as I have struggled to document my reliance on my emotional intelligence and intuition in completing this study, Four Seasons methodology, has permitted me a framework to understand the vocabulary of this affective phenomenon.

Mojado Ethnography: Alongside Gonzalez's work, Enrique Murillo's notion of *mojado ethnography*, an extension of critical ethnography, has been helpful as well. A basic principle of Mojado Ethnography is an unwavering emphasis on the importance of understanding one's power, privilege, and bias as the location of one's positionality. The work of understanding, therefore, begins with the practice of critical self-reflection, the very process that forces the researcher to understand and acknowledge her or his individual positionality, and the manner with which their access to power and privilege can formulate an unwitting bias. This bias can also be considered a lens that filters the world through their specific experiences. The term

“acknowledgement” is the key to this *reflexive ethnography* in that it requires that the researcher take steps to prevent the social power and privilege they hold in relationship to the subjects of study from doing harm to the individuals who are placed under the microscope. Murillo’s argument is that an individual’s experience creates a lens through which she or he understands the world. Without developing a critical awareness of the form and shape of that lens, the researcher is lost to how that lens filters their understanding and representation of the culture and the people who are observed. Self-reflexive practice is the process of unpacking one’s positionality and understanding the complexities of that identity in historical relationship to the identities of the people being studied. Understanding the lens makes it more feasible to take responsibility for how power and privilege can shape the un-interrogated perspective that may emerge.

Murillo’s work also challenges the greatest assumption in ethnography, which is that the ethnographer is always a neutral observer from outside the context of community and that members of said community are always “others” to the researcher. Murillo asserts that the conventions of research begin to change fundamentally as more ethnographers enter the field coming from a community with a history of marginalization and colonization. He uses the necessary steps that these researchers must take to reconcile their own history to deny that it is possible for researchers to be objective at all.

Mojado is a derogatory vernacular term in Spanish assigned to Mexicans and other Latinos who cross the nation-state border into the United States (in English the translation would be *wetback*). Socially, politically, economically, and legally, these individuals are constructed “illegal entrants.” Use of the term is endemic of the distrust and disgust expressed in the xenophobic attitudes within the U.S. zeitgeist toward illegal immigrants from the Spanish-

speaking countries in North and South America. The experience of a researcher from within a community that is the focus of the study can require the crossing of these lines. To complicate this, the academic researcher of any class or cultural background also holds her or his own privilege when crossing the lines between the community of origin and the academic world. This often requires a blurring of the boundaries between researcher, subject, narrator, translator, which in conventional cases can remain discreet.

Controlled Comparisons

I have borrowed the method of controlled comparisons to assist in the development of a close case analysis from Lila Abu-Lughod, a sociology scholar who has conducted extensive research regarding the sociological historiography of several large metropolitan cities in the United States. She has developed comparative histories of three American metropolises, in *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America's Global Cities* (2007) and *Changing Cities* (1991). She found large-scale quantitative studies limited in their usefulness in developing a deep analysis and causal hypothesis for events. She developed her notion of controlled comparisons as a strategy for achieving balance between ethnographic thick description with temporal limitations and a template for reconstructing a larger context. An expanded context with this method enables deeper historical analysis, a deeper vertical perspective to accompany an expansive horizontal one. Abu-Lughod critiques large-scale quantitative studies, which she describes as “miss[ing] the historical antecedents” and which “offer too little context” (2007). Individualized studies lean on the aggregation of momentary details and, although important in creating generalizable analysis, they falter in developing a critical understanding of the complexity of an event within an expanded historical context.

In lieu of detailed, yet broad, case studies, Abu-Lughod relies on a model of controlled comparison case study analysis. Characteristic of this model is the need to create a balance within the corpus of selected cases, consisting of a selective and limited set of comparative cases over time. The analysis from a large-scale comparison across the set and from the details within each comparative case emerges simultaneously, lending insight into the spatial and temporal influences of an event. Abu-Lughod focused upon events leading to the initial formation and subsequent growth of major U.S. cities, their economic systems, class difference, residency patterns, etc. Her set of subjects fell across a wide spectrum, from those making structural decisions, to those on the margins most affected by these decisions, as well as the political culture of each respective city. Her goal was to develop an analysis of race and ethnic relations in the United States and to “suggest some paths to achieving greater empowerment, progress, and peace for the excluded and the most vulnerable” (2007).

My research borrows this method of controlled comparisons, constructing a set of case studies from three community-based arts intervention projects within the city of Los Angeles, California, across a period of thirty years. I am not focused solely on the operations of race and ethnic relations in these cases, but I do focus on identity formation among youth within the context of each project. This requires that I understand the influence of multiple aspects of individual and group identity as they manifest within each setting. I do so, inspired by Abu-Lughod, to offer insight about, suggestions for, and arguments regarding process design, pedagogy, daily operations, and arts products within arts interventions with urban youth.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

This introductory chapter contextualizes the community-based arts practice in Los Angeles that is the focus of this dissertation. Cross-disciplinary bodies of literature are featured in order to clarify the theoretical framework needed to analyze the subsequent case studies. The chapter also provides the methodological influences of the research and the writing format of this dissertation.

Chapter one, Project ABLE historicizes a youth theater-based HIV prevention project that operated in Los Angeles, California in the 1990s. The chapter historicizes the initiation of the program and contextualizes the socio-cultural conditions of Los Angeles that influenced the specific design of the intervention and foregrounded the development of a youth ensemble with the theater company. I highlight three key concepts to youth engagement in this chapter: *Context and framing, art value and empowerment.*

Chapter two, STAHR! documents a film based youth intervention at the turn of the 21st century in Los Angeles, California. The chapter establishes the impact of media representation upon urban working class youth of color from a media studies perspective. The chapter also explores the connections between film analysis and phenomenological analysis to consider the manner with which art interventions can help youth to resist the negative affects of popular media. The chapter also explains the importance of art-making projects engaging with critical media literacy as a specific strategy to help youth counter the influence of in their own lives. I highlight three key concepts to youth engagement in this chapter: *Media representation and power, and institutional power.*

Chapter three, Will Power To Youth. This chapter explains the last case study – an on-going project that integrates the classical theater of Shakespeare with dialogic process. This

chapter explores a specific artist community of community-based practitioners in a prolonged effort to build a dialogic theater program as a response the Los Angeles 1992 Uprising. I highlight three key concepts to youth engagement in this chapter: *dialogic process*, and *conscious community, empowerment*.

Combined chapters 1 through 3 animate the theoretical framework presented in the introduction by mining deeply through each of the controlled comparisons and the contrasting successes and failures to re-evaluate efficacy. These chapters also serve to historicize traditions of community-based practice focused on dialogic process with urban Los Angeles youth. As we venture through this section of the dissertation, I want to historicize the practice and the cultural context of these projects: What inspired their origins? How did these programs respond to the social environment? My intention is to glean the components that I believe useful in analyzing the motives and efficacy of creative collaborations with marginalized youth.

The concluding chapter summarizes the key concepts that are analyzed within these interventions. In this chapter, I summarize the seven concepts and offer them as radical maneuvers to community-based art-making practice in the effort to promote a general effort to focus on building critical consciousness among urban youth and the art practitioners that engage with them.

Chapter 1

Project ABLE

Project ABLE originated in 1985 as a class project for Lisa Russell, a graduate student earning a master of public health degree at UCLA's School of Public Health. I became a member of the group in 1991, immediately following my graduation from high school. She recalls that one of her professors required students to create a hypothetical grant proposal for a health intervention of their own design. At the time, she was an intern with the High Risk Youth Program, a joint venture of the Los Angeles Free Clinic and Children's Hospital, Los Angeles. Her internship duties included conducting birth control counseling with youth and developing a counseling protocol for administering services to the complex population of homeless and low-income high-risk youth that comprised the client base (Russell, telephone conversation).

The High Risk Youth Program (HRYP) was founded in 1982 by Children's Hospital Los Angeles, in collaboration with the Los Angeles Free Clinic (L AFC) to offer comprehensive, client-centered health services to homeless youth. Los Angeles Free Clinic was founded in the 1960s to offer free health care to all. L AFC, by the 1980s, became a reliable provider of health, psychological, case management, and legal services to a diverse population, in particularly adult homeless populations in the western and central areas of the city. Their partner, Children's Hospital Los Angeles was founded in 1901, with the Division of Adolescent Medicine instituted in 1963 to provide comprehensive health and psychosocial services specialized for adolescents. Both organizations developed nationally recognized models of service, and both became known for providing services to diverse and complicated populations of residents throughout Los Angeles County (Yates, 1991).

Psycho-Social Context of Population

In the late 1980s, the Division of Adolescent Medicine and the Los Angeles Free Clinic served the Hollywood/Wilshire area, which at the time consisted of 415,913 residents. Almost half of that population's annual income fell below the national poverty level by two-hundred percent. A large proportion were recent immigrants from multiple countries, adding to the complexity of the population. The student body at nearby Hollywood High School spoke more than thirty languages. The actual number of homeless youth, however, was difficult to assess due to the transient nature of their circumstances. A 1985 study, presented by Yates in a 1991 article, struggled to account for an accurate number. The study found that compiling numbers to account for homeless youth was near impossible with the existing infrastructure. They could only estimate that at different intervals, the estimated number of homeless youth in California fluctuated from 12,700 to 128,000. Researchers were also able to discern from this data that homeless youth from across the nation comprised the population in the Hollywood area (Yates, 1991). The same study found that the runaway population in Los Angeles county became younger, more ethnically varied, and more emotionally disturbed between 1980 to 1985. Invariably, youth were escaping homes and families that were abusive, neglectful, and highly dysfunctional (Yates, 1991).

The increasing presence of homeless youth in the 1970s and 1980s, consequently, intensified the degree of drug use and youth sex work, which added to the collection of health issues experienced by this population: 52% were diagnosed as abusing drugs, 35% engaged in intravenous drug use, and 26% had been involved in sex work. This data was gathered from information recorded by physicians, who, as adults, were highly unfamiliar with and mistrusted by the population. The lack of trust that homeless youth generally felt for adults led researchers

to accept that these numbers were probably drastic underestimations (Yates, 1991). The 1985 study also showed that among the HRYP clientele, “85% were diagnosed as depressed, 9% were diagnosed as actively suicidal, 20% were diagnosed as having previously attempted suicide, and 18% were suffering from other severe mental health problems, e.g. behavior, personality, or thought disorders” (Yates, 1991).

The Division of Adolescent Medicine and the Los Angeles Free Clinic specialists developed services to address these complicated risk factors to emerge at the forefront of a new field of adolescent medicine. Together, these organizations developed several approaches that were sensitive to the deep alienation and mistrust felt among the population, beginning with the High Risk Youth Program (HRYP). Eventually, the HRYP staff became nationally recognized experts in providing comprehensive health services to homeless youth.

During the same era, the youth population in Los Angeles became one of the most heavily incarcerated (Steinberg, 1992). At this time, California was one of the “most punitive” and “neglectful” states in the U.S. regarding the treatment of youth in the juvenile justice system. California comprised 11% of the U.S. population but housed “20% of the juveniles locked up in the entire nation” at the time; and in 1990, minors between the ages of 13 to 17 were 9% of California’s population but comprised “26% of all felony arrests for property related offenses and 14% of all felony arrests for violent offenses.” In the 1980s, Los Angeles County also adopted an “increasingly punitive approach to juvenile crime.” Much of the archived national data from juvenile correctional facilities illustrates that California had the “highest per capita rate of male juveniles” of any state in the country—1, 099 per 100, 000 which was about twice the national rate. The higher California arrest rate was also reflected in the higher incarceration rate

among male youth in California: in 1987, the number of youth in custody was “56% higher than the national average” (Steinberg, 1992).

Earlier in the decade, from 1980 to 1985 juvenile arrests in the state had declined, but the subsequent rise has been attributed to several factors. Illegal drug networks were expanding, which gave birth to increased gang activity as crack cocaine was introduced to urban centers; the state was also beginning to see the effects of the 1978 Proposition 13 “Tax Revolt” (Steinberg, 1992). The passing of Proposition 13 drastically cut property taxes and subsequently cut the state budget, having the most dramatic affect on the probationary system, including the juvenile intervention services offered at the time. Despite the earlier decline in the decade, by the end of 1989, juvenile arrests rose to 238,000, with a conviction rate of about 60% (Steinberg, 1992). In this environment, the Division of Adolescent Medicine continued to create collaborative initiatives with a number of other agencies “in order to build and strengthen the network of existing services” and assist in the development of a “comprehensive system of care” for youth throughout Los Angeles County (Yates, 1991). The Division of Adolescent Medicine and the Los Angeles Free Clinic, aware of this climate first hand, invested in expanding their services according to the identified needs of the predominantly homeless, runaway, and probationary/incarcerated youth populations that accessed their services.

A Pattern Emerges

Russell was indoctrinated into this field of experts when she began her internship with the High Risk Youth Program and quickly developed her own skills and expertise. Soon, she noticed a pattern among the youth clients engaged in sexual behavior that put them at high-risk for contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. As she submitted her project ideas to

complete her class obligations, she was inspired to pursue the possibility of establishing a practical version of the program (Russell, telephone conversation). Coincidentally, the State of California Office of AIDS Programs and Policies issued the first request for proposals (RFP) at this time for HIV prevention programs. The parameters for HIV-related programming were standardized domestically by the Centers for Disease Control, which was in the throes of developing protocols for treatment, prevention, and research within the first years of the epidemic.

Russell, informed by her experience, was strongly critical of the fact that the initial RFP's rather narrowly defined the priorities of addressing HIV risk (Russell, telephone conversation). In order to be eligible for grant monies, applicants were required to design programs that solely addressed high-risk behaviors, without concern for the social contexts within which such behaviors took place. From her experience in the field, Russell believed that it would be wiser to focus on group trends in behavior rather than on individuals, in order to intervene where peer attitudes influence individual sexual behavior. Also, by the mid 1980s, the field of medicine knew that people diagnosed with AIDS were HIV-positive an average of eight to twelve years prior to developing AIDS. This fact, combined with the data Russell had been collecting during her internship, indicated to her that the high numbers of young people she observed being diagnosed who were in their twenties, had been infected during their teens.

Russell recognized the opportunity presenting itself, so she approached the Los Angeles Free Clinic to collaborate on developing her class project into a youth peer education program utilizing theater-based health education. The Los Angeles Free Clinic was receptive to the idea and assigned Arlene Schneir, Program Coordinator, to provide administrative support for Russell as she accessed Los Angeles Free Clinic resources to initiate the project. Her research and

observations revealed that peer education in the United States was gaining popularity and Project ABLE was one of hundreds of peer education programs being implemented during the late 1980s (Russell, telephone conversation). Although the field of peer education was expanding, peer health education, and specifically peer health education for youth, was relatively rare at this time. The appearance of college-based peer health promotion was emerging, so at the moment of its inception, Project ABLE (as an arts-based health intervention) was a unique endeavor, approaching work that was almost exclusively happening within youth social justice networks. In her assessment, the lack of youth theater projects throughout the state was indicative of gaps in the mentorship available to youth. This would influence how she oversaw the implementation of her own vision (Russell, interview).

Russell Responds

The primary idea of Project ABLE was to create a project that encouraged affective or emotional engagement with youth peers through narrative storytelling. She believed from her experience that youth actors would have a greater potential to create strong points of identification and therefore have greater influence on youth clients, than would adults. Her goal was to create for the youth accessing the HRYP a play that reflected their very real experiences of homelessness, addiction, and violence. Implementing the project, however, would prove to be unexpectedly difficult. Russell and another LAFC staff member that worked closely with her during the initiation phase, Nina Mancina, soon found that finding writers who understood their educational and behavior change goals would be an unprecedented challenge. Russell relied heavily on the notion that presenting a story to the audience that seemed realistic to them, would stir an emotional response, create an emotional attachment to the characters and the resolution of their

story. This effect, Russell believed would amplify the impact of the educational elements on the audience. Familiar with social modeling theory, she was convinced that theater would be the necessary method and that a youth cast would be the most appropriate, however, she was unprepared for how difficult it would be to “hit the right notes” in developing the piece (Russell, telephone conversation).

Russell found the first steps of developing Project ABLE a dangerous road to navigate. The idea quickly gained widespread popularity but it became clear that few had traveled this path before and even fewer understood her vision. Several staff members within the High Risk Youth Program, in either the Los Angeles Free Clinic or the Division of Adolescent Medicine, believed in the potential of such an idea. The concept quickly became popular among members of the Los Angeles Free Clinic Board of Directors, who were involved in the film and television industries. They were eager to help develop an innovative project, and several volunteered their time to write a script. This added a complication to the work when a board member who was also a high profile television writer/director got involved. In his iteration of the program, the educational aspects of the project were unfortunately very weak as his manuscript represented youth as flat caricatures and leaned on a sense of humor that made their experience and identity the punchline. He did little research, and instead he relied on his naïve understanding of the population and their life circumstances. The result was a script that reflected the style and tone he utilized in writing popular situational comedies for television, and his humor echoed the commercial sensibilities typical within the entertainment industry.

The professional film and television writers on the board seemed desperate in their enthusiasm to help with this exciting and innovative idea, creating waiting lists as artist after artist expressed interest. However, the scripts they produced were the exact opposite of what

Russell and her team were seeking. As commercial writers, the tone they created invariably lacked the insight and nuance that the audience could appreciate. Instead, these experimental scripts represented narratives that relied heavily on reductive and problematic stereotypes of adolescence and homeless youth. The writers treated the stories with a casual air and continued to frame the young people's experiences as punch-lines, failing to portray the dignity and the complexity of individuals in challenging circumstances. Russell intuitively knew this would fail to connect with Project ABLE audiences and would not help accomplish the goals.

Russell continued to search—obligated by the grant from the California State of AIDS to initiate the project, undeterred by these obstacles—for a more sensitive writer or producer who could help create the material that would respect the dignity of the audience. In this moment, a young filmmaker, Jane Rosenthal, who often volunteered with Los Angeles Free Clinic, approached Russell after seeing an earlier iteration. Rosenthal had worked in a community-based social justice context with foster youth earlier in life and much of her prior experience intersected with the issues affecting the high-risk youth population of the Los Angeles Free Clinic. Rosenthal tried to develop a script but her strength was not as a writer and she knew they would need to find one. With Rosenthal's involvement, Russell's team recruited a collaborator with the capacity to write a strong, insightful script.

Lessons in Collaboration

In 1987, Oliver Goldstick was a young screenwriter who was told about Project ABLE by a friend who was volunteering at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center. He contacted Rosenthal and was quickly commissioned to further research and write the first script of Project ABLE's repertoire. Goldstick remembers how pressing homelessness and AIDS prevention

were at the time in the public consciousness. He cared deeply about the issues, so he jumped immediately into the writing process. He began by interviewing several young people who were residents of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center and who were clients of Los Angeles Free Clinic. As he developed the script, Goldstick recalls being inspired by how deeply he was touched by *Runaways*, a play by Elizabeth Swados. He had seen a production of this play about runaway youth while he was still an undergraduate student at Ann Arbor Michigan and was “deeply touched by [the] commitment to portray the diverse gallery of characters onstage with honesty and humor” (Goldstick, personal communication). Goldstick finished a script within weeks with these influences in mind.

Street Where I Live was a thirty-minute one-act play that told the story of eight young people, ages fifteen to twenty-two, who lived on the streets of Hollywood, California. It chronicled a brief moment in the lives of these young people portraying what their day-to-day activities were while surviving on the streets (Goldstick, 1987). In the opening scene eight young people’s lives are altered as they find out that someone among their close group of friends has been diagnosed with AIDS and is given only days to live. The rest of the group is propelled into a tailspin as they all react very differently to the news. Although not based on specific stories, Oliver shaped each character after a person whom he had met while researching the project. He included elements of their lives, including the motivations for moving to Hollywood that he heard relayed to him, and common behavior or events that could put them at risk for contracting HIV. Then he took artistic license in creating relationships between these characters to bring them into a single narrative.

Street would be an amalgamation of the people he encountered and their stories, including their experiences with running away from abusive families, *coming out* to their

parents, being kicked out of their homes for it, unplanned pregnancies, being covertly recruited and seduced into sex work, surviving rape, relationship violence, sexual abuse, addiction, drug use, and learning the rules of living on the streets of L.A. Goldstick explained that working on such a piece presented multiple challenges, “the first and foremost one being [...] trust”. He remembers spending time with the young people he interviewed to reassure them that “their stories would be treated with dignity” and respect (Goldstick, personal communication). The second challenge was collecting stories from people who were willing to “expose painful truths” and not betray that trust by portraying “them in a sentimental light,” so he relied on trying to set a balance of detachment and humor while treating their stories with dignity (Goldstick, personal communication)

The Context and Framing of Art-Making

The struggle to identify an artist who could capture the appropriate tone in the above passage illustrates a common hurdle. Community-based engagement generally creates opportunities for professionals of various fields to cross lines of difference. Although I was not a party to these events described above, I have witnessed firsthand and heard other practitioners discuss tone-deaf collaborators attempting to work with populations or communities. The issues seem to arise from fundamental assumptions made by artists who underestimate the importance of connecting with members of community they are working with. In the previous example, it directly affected the art that the group produced. In other instances, a lack of sensitivity or self-awareness, essential to community-based work, can impede elements of relationship building and meaning-making for project participants. In the effort to argue for the importance of the interpersonal dynamics of community-based work, I believe it is important to start by complicating the term

community, which is routinely used rather vaguely. Accepting this vagueness permits collaborators to enter communities with naivety. On a more general level, the acceptance of ambiguous terms related to practice points to a need for specificity.

Individuals filter complex ideas, concepts, and systems through their system of values, making the framing of these issues a key factor in understanding their relevance (as illustrated in the example with Project ABLE). The term community slips between meanings in practice and tends to mean different things to different people depending on the context and the specific person using the word. In the previous chapter, I defined community as a dynamic process occurring in a space, which is continuous, connected, complicated, historical, and paved by economic and political relations. This notion complicates community so that the nuances of experience, lived and historical, are brought into relief. Analyzing that history will reveal that the sharing of experience bares a semiotic system, and an order to logic, which can have a strong influence on defining and framing the priorities, the aesthetics, identity, social power, privilege, and relationship building within an engaged project.

A steadily expanding body of literature from several academic fields offers practical perspectives on community-based art practice, much of it focusing on interpreting work, reflecting on the skeletal shape of collaborative process, historicizing the lineage of practitioners in community-based practice, and the aesthetic issues it raises for the established art world. Scholars theorizing process has been minimal, however, with even less analysis of the program from the perspective of engaged community members. This would lead to tectonic shifts in multiple layers of what community-based process looks, feels, and sounds like.

Responsiveness to Context Through Deep Research

I am not proposing a universal template, but I am suggesting a framework for analysis to develop a project that is sensitive and responsive to each community. Indeed, social engagement is conducted across disciplines – critical race theory, feminist theory, queer theory, education, the arts, social and human sciences – and is often written with the intention of influencing areas that are not invested in synthesizing quantitative and qualitative data analysis (Helguera, 2011).

Artists informed by deep research will be better equipped to develop critical community arts engagement as their understanding of the cultural, sociological, political, and historical context of marginalized and economically impoverished communities. These oppressive structures are significant factors in molding the perceptions of individuals, both from within a marginalized community and from outside of it. The dominant have historically pathologized communities on the margins, leading to an oversaturation of narrow representations and interpretations of those respective identities.

Artists working in community-based processes walk into a community that 1) has a living culture, a repertoire of aesthetics, on-going relationships, accomplished local artists, a legacy of creativity; and 2) is usually well-versed with authority figures exerting their respective authority (the police, teachers, and local governments). Many artists know this and implement a code of ethics to frame their interactions with community members, but this is not standardized. I propose a critical research-based approach to develop customized, sensitive, meaningful, engaged practices with community. This criticality can be used to understand the complexities of a community and the complication of how that community is represented by outside perspectives, which tend to be in service to the dominant order.

I would add a disclaimer at this point that there are limits to what can be learned through such research, but it is important for the artist to walk into a setting informed about the contexts of the community's experience that are more deeply rooted than in the individual's immediate experience. Such an undertaking of research will not, of course, be all encompassing but historical and sociological mechanisms operate to create social inequities. Learning the complexity of structural oppression predates the lifespan of community members and will affect the understanding of aesthetics, the content of artwork, and an appreciation for how process facilitates the exploration of these with community members. Key to developing a process sensitive to these mechanisms is the cultivation of critical thinking skills and tools which can be integrated within project design as a new practice for community members and ongoing practice for the artists and the participants/community members.

Artist Preparation and Contextual Research

Preparation for the community-based artist begins before the project. It begins with the training and development of the artistic practice. Artists, therefore, must understand that the skills of engagement and collaboration are as much an element of the aesthetics as the components of the goals in community-based processes. Attention to these skills in preparation and training needs to be as thorough and rigorous as is expected of the art-making itself. Although many scholars write about engaged process, few investigate the nuances of that process. The challenge I am describing revolves around artists creating a standard of educating themselves about the community with which they are engaging and to raise questions regarding the act of crossing lines of difference and *going into a community*. Engaging community means entering into a relationship with a specific sociological and cultural history. The fact of the matter is the

relevance of the work for community members depends upon a process built by artists. Unless artists critically design that process to engage with that history, the meaning of process and art can falter.

Granted, there is a long history of this imperative being placed upon the agents of community engagement, often referred to as formative research in the human sciences. Admittedly, as an ideal, this practice is ambitious at best. It is much easier to hold this standard than it has been to execute. However, the practice is the point. Such an expectation supports a meticulous attention to detail that is impossible to satisfy; yet such a practice can cultivate an appreciation for background research.

I must confess that I argue for this approach in response to several experiences that I have had with collaborators who have, in my eyes, failed to capture the nuances of a community's experience in favor of appealing to a broader audience. One occasion, I was hired as an arts facilitator by a major theater company in Los Angeles to assist a residential high school program. My job was to simultaneously create a climate among the youth 1) to make them feel comfortable to talk within the group of youth and 2) to share about their ideas, opinions, and personal stories. The director was ambitious and it became apparent over the first weeks that he was motivated to impress the producers of the company and parlay this job into a chance to direct on the main stage of the company's theater. This manifested in his notes regarding the developing script. His notes, I noticed, demonstrated his bias toward portraying the social conditions of the high school we were in residence as perilous and dangerous. This, he thought would create exciting drama for the audience, it would offer them "a way in" to the story we were telling.

As far as I could see, however, he misunderstood the purpose of the program and was completely willing to mischaracterize the youth. I struggled in my restricted role to discuss this with him but I felt restricted by what I saw as his disinterest in listening. The producer of the project tried to speak with him, as well. From what I observed, they had several conversations about the details in the script regarding how we portrayed the youth and the overall tone of the production. What became clear, was he thought the priority should be to create a piece that most people could relate to, so we should minimize and obscure the esoteric elements of the script that might be too specifically about our host high school culture. I, and the producer, tried to make clear to him that the power of the piece would emerge from a story that was specific—that the power of the piece would be in those high school youth not participating in the production recognizing themselves in the story. He worried about losing the broader audience at the sake of appealing to a smaller one.

For me, he is the epitome of collaborators that fail to understand that marginalized communities are consistently silenced and obscured by these sorts of compromises, of favoring the universal to define relevance or quality. Such choices pander to the dominant perspective and serve to dilute and misinterpret the community. This is not inevitable, however. There are strategies to avoid being complicit. First, if the artist is willing, she must accept the responsibility for educating herself about structural systems of oppression. This means accepting that the community is not responsible for explaining history or structural oppression. This is the fundamental work of developing criticality. Cultivating such sensitivity will have enormous impacts on every level of a program: project design, the definition of priorities, goals, the artist facilitators brought on board, the aesthetics chosen for the project, the model used to generate

new content, and the distilling of that content (themes, narrative arcs, thematic and visual tropes, locations).

Context and Criticality

Moreover, such category of research is in service to the work of developing process and product relevant to a community. This necessarily requires a willingness among artists to understand one's own positionality regarding structural oppression. This is a point I would like to emphasize particularly because the data illustrates how frequently working class communities of color are solicited as sites of engagement with artists whose own cultural experience means they are unfamiliar with the community and its complexities. Most frequently, these artists do not share aspects of the identities reflected in a community (Eaton, 2010). This is hardly an argument that people from different experiences cannot work with each other, but it is a caution. When our experiences create the lens through which we understand the world, what is missed in relationships when one has more professional respect, more clout, more access, more resources, more social power, more mobility, and therefore more power than the other—particularly when there are institutionalized mechanisms in place to ensure the dominant maintains the center. This is why I call for a push to critical art-making in engaged process.

The strongest tactic with engaged artists can resist this is to develop self-awareness about their own lived experience, as well as an awareness of how that experience creates a lens of perception. Self-awareness is the first step toward building a practice of critical self-reflection that can serve to enrich priorities, goals, project design, and inform the resulting aesthetics. Building these skills will help increase the artist's capacity to make informed decisions regarding engagement - to ask, to hear, to discuss, to explore with, to handle sensitively, to make safe, to

see as equals, to inform an understanding of context, to identify appropriate priorities, and facilitate meaningful exchanges. (I will discuss this more thoroughly in a later chapter, but this context will underscore and inform the necessity of mutuality in dialogic process and in developing relationships with community members, the objective of which is to expand the definitions and measures.)

Justice and / versus Healing

I would like to emphasize another reason that research is important. Proper research can help challenge the framing of marginalized communities as “lacking” and balance the rhetoric of “healing” that is often vaguely ascribed to community-based art-making endeavors. Above, I shared an example of an artist motivated to do this for what I might characterize as selfish reasons, but there is also a tendency to define communities in this manner out of a genuine interest to help and “do good.” Regardless of the external motivation, such perspectives are myopic. Furthermore, the use of “healing” motives to rationalize projects undermines the potential efficacy of community-based art practice. “Healing” rhetorics places the responsibility of improving the quality of life on the individual and frames the problem as an issue that has the possibility of being solved or changed by an individual. This is simply inaccurate and incomplete and ignores the structural issues, which create the circumstances, conditions, and the systemic problems at the root of common individual wounds in marginalized communities. In presenting the story of Project ABLE and analyzing the facets of it, I would like to first point out the project assumed a structural approach. As a social service / health education project, the program was rooted in an educational model that attempted to address the structural influences of personal risk for HIV. As I illustrate the story, it will become clear that the services and the play

addressed personal choice and health issues within the context of the individual's total experience. Part of the importance of conducting research in art practice, I assert is to bolster the structural facets of a project and expand its potential effectiveness.

As discussed above, Project ABLE was developed in response to an immediate need. Russell's training and the context of the field she worked within helped develop a specific lens through which she was able to understand the complexity of the population. Her nuanced understanding of the population led to her appreciation for the complexity of experiences, which was then translated into the scripts and performances. Her empathy for the plight of young people was a starting point from which she began her intervention. The key to the progress of the program – the knowledge that influenced her understanding of what content would work and what would not—was her criticality regarding the social and historical reasons that homeless and high-risk youth in Los Angeles. This understanding of the relationship between individual choice and structural oppression is complementarily reflected in the relationship between the synthesis of resources offered in the collaboration between Project ABLE, at the interpersonal level and its host organization, Los Angeles Free Clinic, at the institutional level.

Context and Critical Framing

Granted, Project ABLE was a unique endeavor. Generally, project designers may not desire to develop the same comprehensive resources or approach; however, it remains vital to the meaning and efficacy of a project that designers, artists, facilitators understand the sociological and historical contexts when undergoing social justice projects in particular. Indeed, cultivating a nuanced sensitivity to the experience and the social conditions of marginalized populations depends upon becoming literate in the structural inequalities they face. This may not sound like

a new point to practitioners, but I argue that the importance here is to understand the precarious balance between knowing what is denied marginalized communities on account of structural oppression while not totalizing them as victims needing to be rescued. Marginalized communities host complicated, resource rich, and resilient social systems. Outsiders to and members of a community first need to recognize that there are resources within a community. Community-based practitioners working with goals focused on issues of health, education, justice, and personal development may find this argument salient to their work.

Consider the common framing of goals in practice, and the language used to describe these goals, to teach, to transform, learn, change, improve, shift, etc. How often does the language reflect the use of *lack* pathologies or normative *deficit-thinking*, where the world of the practitioner is centered and the community members are diagnosed with a condition that must be fixed? These frames recapitulate structural oppression by ignoring that the issue is an institutional issue and not an intrapersonal one that can be cured. The key point here is that it is not healing that needs to be supported by community-based practice, but justice. There are fields that address the intrapersonal, i.e., psychology, art therapy, drama therapy, and health education. Collaborations with these fields can address both simultaneously. Community-based projects can also incorporate psychological and support services as part of their team and understand how they influence personal development. However, what we need to understand is that, fundamentally, a healing discourse distracts from a justice framework. Many branches of these fields already confront the structural elements of the difficulties faced by individuals.

My point is the question of “how can we help heal?” is the rhetorical equivalent of “how can we help young people accept being marginalized so that it goes more smoothly for them?” Neither of these addresses the issue of directly confronting the operations of marginalization.

Pathology rhetoric and deficit-thinking places the onus on communities of color to learn the knowledge and skills valuable to the dominant order. This ideology naturalizes the value and quality of school systems and assumes that institutions are effective and equitable. The importance of this framework is to shift framing away from deficit-thinking by shining light on a broader concept of cultural capital.

Community Cultural Wealth

Cultural studies and critical race theory offer theoretical support to redefine the “lack” of cultural resources often discussed in communities of color and center perspectives, voices, experiences placed on the periphery of popular narrative. Notions of cultural capital are often built upon the French philosopher and sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of capital. He explains that cultural, social, and economic capital is “acquired by birth through family or through formal schooling” (Yosso, 2006). He sought to structurally critique social/cultural reproductions, but his theory of cultural capital has been used to base assumptions that some communities are culturally wealthy and the rest are culturally poor. This interpretation has assisted in the recapitulation that white middle class culture is a universal standard and point of reference for all aesthetics (Yosso, 2006). The key to Bourdieu’s definition is that the capital possessed by the privileged becomes the frame of reference regarding cultural, economic, and aesthetic value. Using this definition then inevitably leads to an implicit assumption that collapses those without privilege into a lack of cultural capital.

Tara J. Yosso, however, challenges Bourdieu-ian cultural capital theory in formulating her own theory of cultural wealth. Her theory is not new, but it does represent an alternative to existing modes of scholarship which neglect a historical understanding of identity construction

and the influence that racialization has upon notions of identity. Generally, Yosso emphasizes critical race theory as a guiding lens to inform research in and on communities of color. She borrows five tenets from education scholar Daniel Solorzano. These five tenets (which they argue can and should inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum, and policy) are: 1) intercentricity of race and racism, 2) the challenge to dominant ideology, 3) the commitment to social justice, 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and 5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches.

A common maneuver within dominant ideology is to obscure markers of race, class, age, and gender. The experience of race is often used to indicate the sum of cultural difference. Yosso, however, defines culture as the “behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people...[as] evidenced in material and nonmaterial productions of a people. Culture as a set of characteristics is neither fixed nor static” (Yosso, 2006). In her definition, she departs from Bourdieu’s concept of cultural wealth by reconceiving culture as a collective process producing both tangible and intangible results.

Where Bourdieu, explains that cultural capital is an “accumulation of cultural knowledge and skills, and abilities possessed by privileged groups in society” (Yosso, 2006), Yosso’s work challenges the false equivalency. Her theory recalibrates culture in such a manner that considers privilege negligible when defining cultural capital. For Yosso, cultural capital is only one form of many different aspects that might be considered valuable.

Dialectical Meaning and Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso defines the various forms of community cultural wealth as: 1) aspirational capital, including being resilient despite real and perceived barriers; 2) linguistic capital, the intellectual

and social skills cultivated from communication experiences in more than one language or linguistic code; 3) familiar capital, cultural knowledges compiled from community history, memory, and cultural intuition; 4) sense of community well-being; 5) a broad concept of family and kinship; 6) social capital, which is the networks of people and community resources as they are understood and their accessibility; 7) instrumental/emotional support to navigate institutions; 8) navigational capital, skills of maneuvering through social institutions; 9) individual agency within and against institutional constraints; 10) connected to social networks that facilitate community navigation through places and spaces; 11) resistant capital, knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality; 12) the skills necessary to resist institutionally enforced subordination, including cultural knowledge of the structures of racism and motivation to transform such oppressive structures.

This system of community cultural wealth supports a dialectical understanding of culture in communities of color. Beyond the economic, there are resources within marginalized communities that are also valuable resources, which are often unrecognized by a dominant perspective. Purposeful expansion of terms of value assigned to art assists in developing a significant understanding of how to make meaning and expand meaningful art collaboration in community-based art's context. Here, I would like to add other scholars with Yosso's work to contemplate the parameters used to evaluate art value and quality. These add to Yosso's theory regarding cultural capital and speak to form and content of art made in marginalized communities.

Art Value: The Un-fine Arts

As mentioned earlier, several writers failed to create an appropriate script for Project ABLE. They were experienced, talented artists in their fields, who had inherited certain standards of value steeped in commercial priorities pandering to consumer interest. Without a doubt, this reality exists for most medium and fields of art production: quality and value are determined by the price they bring. For the fine arts, esoteric training in the standards of form is also a significant factor that determines a monetary price, which then determines worth.

With the influence of the values that emerge out of the modernist movement, fine arts values reflects an importance of individualism, freedom, and self-expression. In this paradigm, artists are individual geniuses, whose experience is ahistorical and apolitical and their respective artwork is appreciated specifically for transcending notions of ordinary culture. Suzi Gablik has highlighted these characteristics to hold this system under close scrutiny. She refutes the modernist assertion that art exists outside culture, arguing that the quality and values which “qualify the worth of fine art are contingent to experience” (Gablik, 1995). Her observation raises the issue of the connection between lived experience and the conception of good art. Gablik challenges the absence of lived experience as a point of artistic merit by highlighting the absence of contextual relevance and social responsibility and proposes that these be added to the considerations of art quality. Her critique can also be applied to the question of how intellectual and artistic merit is determined in the artistry within other fields, such as film, theater, dance, where similar notions of individual genius, cultural hierarchy, and self-expression determine the quality of art product.

Gablik’s argument challenges a notion of fine art that prioritizes elite spaces and creates a hierarchy of space in determining artistic merit. The notion unapologetically, and self-

consciously, devalues community-based art practice. Gablik's position, therefore, represents a vital shift in framing arts engagement, making the resonance explicit between fine art values (individualism, freedom, self-expression) and white, upper-middle class values. The art world consistently produces and appreciates work that reflects that positionality and expresses their own cultural values, despite the cognitive dissonance with the fact. Although Gablik refers to physical sites when she speaks of space and challenges the spatial hierarchy of the fine arts, I would like to borrow the term. First, I would like to use the term literally to consider the physical sites of art produced by marginalized, working class, and communities of color and I would like to use the term to speak about the figurative space occupied by communities of color.

Among marginalized communities, positionality influences the relationship between art and audience differently. Within these communities, the experience of living within a socially oppressive structure means that they share the experience of being marginalized with a larger community. The art forms created by these artists resonate dialectically between the broader community and the individual artist. Such artists will produce work that does not reflect modernist themes of independence, freedom, and self-expression without problematizing them.

Themes that are popular among artists of color will directly resist images and values that exclude or stereotype their identities and simultaneously affirm the traits of their communities. The dialectic relationship between art of artists of color and the working class communities of color that they are from will reflect everyday culture, a critical worldview, socio-economic struggle, gender roles, bi-culturality, resilience, family, and tends to operate in resistance to dominant hegemonic discourse and aesthetics. The work characteristically produces a "rereading of signs in the world and ascribing new meaning by rejecting the constraints of one semiotic system in favor of another," where artists take ownership of symbols produced by the dominant

ideology and interject themselves and/or their communities into the symbol, including opinions, challenges, and commentaries (Gonzalez, 2001). Chicana art scholar, Jennifer González explains that artists of color will do this to access and influence the power that the dominant class holds in a semiotic system. In reconstructing these frames of reference “the artist not only creates a new vocabulary, but creates a space for others to examine their own ideologies” by centering their own shared community experience (Gonzalez, 2001).

Conventional art theory, as described by Gablik, recognizes that art can function as an agent of societal and ideological construction. This is a step further than recognizing that art can merely reflect society. This convention holds that the art has the power to influence cultural values (not to be confused with social change, which directly confronts institutionalized oppressions). These aspects can and have been applied to community-based collaborative processes of art-making. Several notable artists conducting community-based practice have done so, such as Amalia Mesa-Bains, Judy Baca, Cornerstone Theater, and Watts Village Theater. Their work reflects collaborative processes committed to art-making that is based on 1) cultivating an understanding of identity, power, and self-determination and 2) assisting a community’s understanding of cultural production and social capital. The understanding of the work must be rooted in an analysis that integrates the historical, economic, political, and cultural particularities of lived experience (including sensitivities to working class, bicultural, gendered, multilingual, immigrant, race, sexuality, etc.). Cultivating this understanding in the art product assists in the development of a similar sensitivity to these issues in process, both in how these play a role in the relationships between artists and community members and in how these might be nurtured within the content of the art work.

The Dialectical Challenge to “Fine” Arts

In other words, the process of making interpersonal relationships between community members and artists is part of the aesthetic construction of the artwork. The difficulty of integrating this notion into one’s practice will depend upon the experience and skillset of the artist, but regardless, it is difficult to operate with this understanding of the quality of the art. Within the context of collaborative work with youth, it is important to highlight this aspect when considering the importance of redefining semiotic systems. The common process of redefinition in which they independently engage requires sensitivity to the self-determination they articulate which can be an immense challenge for those unfamiliar with this cultural process. The commonly accepted priorities of community-based art-making are to highlight, demonstrate, reflect, showcase, and give youth a voice in the process and in the art product. This understanding, indeed, underscores the importance of challenging notions of power within the process and the importance that arts facilitators can imbue their practice with this as priority. Throughout the art process, therefore, it is important to be conscious, conscientious, and sensitive to nuances when reconceiving art with communities of color.

Jan Cohen-Cruz leads the performance literature in discussing qualities that contribute the valuing of art in community-based contexts. She begins by explaining community-based art-making as “a field in which artists, collaborating with people whose lives directly inform the subject matter, express collective meaning” (Cohen-Cruz, 2005). She helps explain that community-based art practice emerges similarly from the same dynamics within which popular art emerges, out of common experience shared by performer, artist, and audience. Popular performance and popular art re-enact these experiences creating a shared knowledge and a deep familiarity with them Cohen-Cruz emphasizes “community-building performance is in this

tradition, committed to cultural forms and content that are expressive of a group of people connected by place, tradition, history, an/or spirit” (Cohen-Cruz, 2005). The fundamental parameters of community-based performance, according to Cohen-Cruz, can be extrapolated from theories of the popular. Relying heavily on Raymond Williams, she clarifies the goals and critiques of community-based practice through an exploration of the popular.

Williams offers five categorical uses of the term “popular” that collectively help illustrate the spectrum of attitudes held for the field. These are that popular is used to describe art as 1) an “implied other to high or learned art”, 2) folk culture, “without the specific marking of an individual artist”, 3) “something addressed to a large number of people and well-liked by the many,” 4) oppositional, which represents a certain kind of interest or experience, as versus the modes of an established culture or as versus a power,” 5) “a very active world of everyday conversation and exchange” which is akin to the everyday and folk culture.

Four of these five are particularly salient in understanding the significance of popular aesthetics and art when in collaboration with urban youth. Returning to Williams’ first definition of popular as an indication of “other”-ness to high or learned art – this definition emphasizes that the aesthetic does not require a specialized training or education for it to be understood or appreciated. Here is where the community-based performance and popular art become vulnerable to critique. Educational and class stratifications reinforce the distinction between popular and high art. Those privileging high art forms argue the broad appeal of the popular as the very thing that diminishes its value in contrast to more esoteric and less generally accessible high art. Beyond Cohen-Cruz’s enlistment of this particular list from Raymond Williams, I would argue that the popularity of the aesthetic is indeed predicated upon a specific training and literacy that develops through repeated exposure to popular aesthetics, which to varying degrees,

resonates with a particularized situatedness. Generalized accessibility intensifies the degree of shared meaning that cannot be said for high art genres. As we turn to critical media literacy later, this will become clearer.

Next, I would like to emphasize the third use of the term, with the popular as art addressed to and appreciated by a large number of people. Within the explanation of this category, a concern may arise that it is referring strictly to mass culture and commercial success. However, Cohen-Cruz tempers any implicit suggestion of this by bringing in Stuart Hall's argument that the popular thrives among diverse audiences and points to the possibility that these contrasting articulations create a balanced definition that accounts for accessibility across a diverse spectrum of audiences. This is further balanced by the fourth category that explains the popular as oppositional to power. In this category, we see that art, which speaks to a particularized interest of experience, is valued. Jan Cohen-Cruz coins the term "convention with invention" to explain the dynamic of this conception of the popular as utilizing conventional genres and infusing them with innovative shifts that create unique facets for it.

The fifth and final use of the term defines popular as a very active world of everyday conversation and exchange. This allies popular aesthetics to those of everyday life making them significant to multiple generations simultaneously. Again, we see the reliance on the everyday experience that resonates with the third category of use summarized by the phrase "liked by the many" (Cohen-Cruz, 2005). Combined, these belie a direct relationship between the artist and the audience, where the material in question is deeply familiar to both as members of a shared community. In this sense, Jan Cohen-Cruz argues that many community-based artists who draw on shared cultural traditions fall into the category of the popular.

Jan Cohen-Cruz's work provides four principles of community-based practice, a

communal context, reciprocity, hyphenation, and active culture. A *communal context* speaks to the notion that the “artist’s craft and vision are at the service of a specific group desire” (Cohen-Cruz, 2005). The second, reciprocity “is the desire for the relationship between community-based artists and participants to be a mutually nourishing one [...]” (Cohen-Cruz, 2005). Third, “[c]ommunity-based [art] is hyphenated in consisting of both multiple disciplines” (Cohen-Cruz, 2005). For Cohen-Cruz, components of community-based practice, such as aesthetics, education, community-building, or therapy “[serve] multiple functions [and] goals [of] both efficacy and entertainment” (Cohen-Cruz, 2005, 97). Finally, community-based practice is marked by “the principle of active culture [which] reflects the recognition that people frequently get more out of making art than seeing the fruits of other’s labors” (Cohen-Cruz, 2005, 99).

To bring this back to land on the terms that define the quality of art: the standards that qualify the value and the quality of art, is the strength of the connection between two sets. One set concerns form, content, and context. The second concerns artist, community, and individual viewer. The reception of the piece by the community that contributed to the process is important. Artists must be aware of the cultural and art paradigms that frame their training in order to cultivate the practice of critical self-reflection, necessary for decentralizing power (I will speak more on this in a later chapter).

Creating A Repertoire

Russell began casting when Goldstick completed the script. Her hypothesis was that a believable cast would allow audience members to emotionally attach, to connect and relate deeply to the character’s experience in the stories resulting in a significant engagement with the performance. Once the script was prepared, the next task was to find a cast that was relatable and believable to

this unique audience. First and foremost, they needed to be convincing in portraying teenagers. They also needed to be strong actors, with a range that could tackle the extreme circumstances they were representing. Finally, they needed to demonstrate an open-minded and compassionate attitude toward the experiences of their unconventional audiences.

Russell was convinced all aspects of the program would rely on the relatability of the actors, that the power of the live performances would be the actors' role in connecting audience members to an emotion, a desire, and into the story. If the actors' performances sparked any doubt, they could risk undermining the potential of the play to create an interest in the educational portion of the program. To accomplish this, the project leadership began to recruit young actors from nearby Hollywood High School's performing arts program and in local trade papers. Eventually, an ensemble of twelve actors, ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-two years old, joined as part-time consultants. They rehearsed for several months prior to performing about two or three times a month for the first year.

During this time, they also developed an education survey to administer at the conclusion of the play, following a question and answer session to measure the amount of information the initial audiences retained. The general feedback and the survey responses from the first set of performances were strong enough that the Los Angeles Free Clinic decided to develop the project into a permanent health education program. Coincidentally, Russell finished her graduate degree during this period. She felt that with the program now on steady ground, it was the right time to move on. This began the transition to the next administrator. Jack Carrel was recruited and hired as the Program Administrator / Health Educator in 1989. Jack was familiar with the program and was eager to take on the leadership because he felt strongly that the program needed someone who understood the importance of treating youth as "competent and capable people

who could accomplish the sort of work that ABLE proposed to do” (Carrel, interview). He believed this would help the youth get more done and earn the respect of their audience.

The following three years produced three more plays. *Homes* depicted five teenagers who were gang affiliated, all friends from the same working class neighborhood. Just as in *Street*, the characters’ world falls apart when one of their friends is diagnosed with AIDS. Each of them is forced to consider their own risk of infection. Kaback wrote a third play, *High Risk*, for a homeless youth audience but, unlike the others, this one raised issues of alcoholism, drug use, and the connections to HIV risk. Then he wrote a final play, *Passing The Test*, for youth in mainstream facilities. It was titled and was set in a high school about an honor student who is confronted with a pregnancy scare only to find out that she has contracted a sexually transmitted infection from her new boyfriend and the school’s star football player.

As the narrative themes of the ABLE repertoire developed, so did the educational and sociocultural issues addressed by the program. During the first two years of the program, a short question and answer session followed the performances. In the very early phases of the program, the actors were not trained on the issues of HIV disease or sexual health and their lack of training in this area became an issue at times when they were asked questions that were beyond their knowledge base. Subsequent cohorts of actors would receive increasing levels of training over the course of several years, in order to accurately and responsibly address questions from the audience.

A Versatile Ensemble

The performances were designed to be portable, with minimal props, and set pieces to meet the audiences where they were in the makeshift performance spaces described in the previous

chapter. Many of these audiences were forced by the facility to attend so they would often act out inappropriately with the cast, and would regularly test the boundaries of appropriateness, sometimes targeting new actors when they appeared to be nervous or unfamiliar with the environment. Some instances were more difficult than others, and the cast would operate as a team to address the issue. Veterans gave space for new people to figure it out, waiting to be asked to assist. Veterans were aware of what to expect and knew they needed to think on their feet, be flexible, and adaptable. Many developed their own techniques for group management and difficult participants. Usually, as cast members proved trustworthy, confident, funny, knowledgeable, and accessible, audiences would relax their attitudes, open up, and begin to listen.

We knew we had gained youth trust when they'd ask us serious questions sincerely. When I first started, Jack Carrel was still on board as the program administrator. Kerry Miguel was the artistic director. I was incredibly intimidated by Miguel and by the actors with the group. They had been around for several years and were obviously seasoned veterans. Carrel and Miguel worked during this time, to develop an ensemble that by design represented a range of young people between the ages of fifteen to twenty-two years old. Most of our training concerned team-building, ensemble building, walking through Hollywood streets at night running lines, HIV education, and reading reports from the California State Department of Health and Human Services, the national Centers for Disease Control, and the World Health Organization. We discussed popular opinion and prepared ourselves to deal with questions that would inevitably be steeped in prejudice and ignorance. We watched documentaries about the Gay Rights Movement in the U.S., films about homeless youth, or fictionalized accounts of the early days of the epidemic. In the era that I was involved, from 1991 to 1994, the program

served as not only a job, but also as a support system for the young people who joined the group. The uniqueness of the program attracted many young artists who were passionate about the mission to inform youth about important issues including the risks of HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

Toward Youth Empowerment

Carrel's leadership style, according to his values, meant creating an environment where young people feelings, ideas, and opinions were respected. This climate created a strong sense of friendship, loyalty, and support among the team who appreciated the respect given their work. In early 1992, Carrel decided to leave Project ABLE and was conscientious about recommending a successor who could continue that legacy. He had made the acquaintance of a young health educator at a social service network meeting. She was the first person that came to mind. He approached Alex Acuña to suggest that she apply for the position, sharing his observation she seemed to have similar sensibilities about enlisting art for health education. She applied and was hired to replace him in March 1992.

Acuña was the health educator at the North East Valley Health Clinic. Her accomplishments there included advocating with the NEVHC to start the first HIV clinic in the San Fernando Valley. In order to do that, she had to undergo intensive work to recruit and build a team because of a general shortage of professionals who specialized in HIV, particularly in the San Fernando Valley. Once she completed this, she felt ready to move on to the next career challenge. At twenty-three years old, Project ABLE became an opportunity for Acuña to work with young people in a creative project and she hoped it would be an opportunity to have more fun with her work. Acuña's impression of Project ABLE had developed months before when she

had seen a performance of *Homes*. She was impressed with the strength of the performers, the creativity, and the innovation of the project. She was aware of the degree of credibility that the project held within the field and had immense respect for what Carrel and Project ABLE were doing. She felt compelled to join the program and take a turn leading the program.

Storytelling and Empowerment

In her assessment, Acuña believed the high level of artistry in both the plays and the performances reflected a sophisticated and forthright brand of storytelling that touched audiences in a meaningful way. This was exceptional in comparison to other youth theater groups at the time. Project ABLE uniquely piloted participants on an emotional journey that often seemed to make them concerned for the characters with intense urgency. Here we see the notion of honesty and storytelling as a return to the conversation in mining factors defining efficacy. The power of storytelling is that when we speak, we create the opportunity to see our story mirrored in the responses and the body of another person or people. Jan Cohen-Cruz and Adrian Cavarero explain this phenomenon in storytelling, noting that the individual's experience obscures its own significance to our selves until others recognize it. The story is imperceptible until it is mediated through another source, until it is witnessed, creating the potential for the individual to better understand and master the length of the narrative.

The potential to understand one's selfhood within storytelling is uniquely impactful for those who are marginalized, whose life story is often over-shadowed deliberately by mainstream narratives, so that in fact, the invisibility of that experience actually becomes a fundamental aspect of the story itself. When one from this position sees his or her story retold in a manner that moves her or him to the center, it shifts that individual's understanding of self "from being

the object or medium of someone else's [speech] to being the subject of one's own' (Cohen-Cruz, 2005). Susan Brison, a philosopher who has written on story sharing and its relationship to recognition explains, 'the act of bearing witness to the [story,] facilitates this shift...by reintegrating the [marginalized storyteller] into a community, reestablishing connections essential to selfhood' (Brison, 2002). The process of marginalization obscures the significance of the subject's experience, until a storyteller listens and performs a story to the marginalized subject who can recognize the preciousness of it in the externalizing of the expression. Russell was pursuing this affect when she initiated the project and it was what Acuña recognized in the program years later when she watched four unbelievable actors in a unique play. Intuitively, they were drawn to the idea, because our stories gain meaning when recognized and witnessed by others.

This understanding helps frame the observations made by Acuña regarding the impact of Project ABLE. She was speaking to the notable absence of storytelling that portrayed the complicated layers of the at-risk population's experience, including practical conversations about sex that rejected the values that sex was taboo and youth should not have sex. Acuña described other theater peer education programs that existed at the time as operating at a B-grade level, including one called Avance with her former organization, North East Valley Health Clinic. Based on her assessment, ABLE was at an "A level," (Acuña, interview) and was much more powerful than what she had seen from other performance based intervention groups. The production value was obviously higher, the actors more skilled and the writing in addressing complicated stories were better. These values would stay a priority throughout her tenure (Acuña, interview).

Youth Training: Critical Thinking and Professional Judgment

When Acuña began with ABLE in 1992, she immediately enhanced the HIV education and sociocultural training of the actors and aspects of the workshop. When she started, the sessions consisted of the play, and then peer educators would conduct a didactic HIV information session, followed by a question and answer period. During her first observation, she recognized the need to animate the educational sections and add some elements to make it as dynamic as the performance portion of the presentation. In so doing, Acuña brought in everything she had learned from her experience with the North East Valley Health Clinic to strengthen the outreach sessions and subsequently she introduced new demands on the ensemble. She knew that heightening the level of interaction with the audiences would be important and would assist in making the information more memorable and accessible. She personally took on the strictly educational aspects of the program and implemented enhanced training in anatomy, reproductive and sexual health education, comprehensive birth control methods, intensive HIV 101 and 201, microbiology, psychology and sociology research, adult education methods, and extensive facilitation skills.

With regard to the theatrical aspects of the program, Acuña discussed the new expectations with Doug Kaback, the artistic director at this time. He in turn enhanced rehearsals with improvisational basics, movement work, and began to research interactive theater models. The team work-shopped these ideas and concepts for a few weeks, figured out a structure, brought in some improvisational methods, read up on theater for social change (including Augusto Boal), implemented the new ideas with audiences and collected responses to determine the relevance and assessed for necessary adjustments. Ultimately, what evolved was a system of

theatrical strategies reminiscent of *Boalian* techniques, which were gaining popularity in activist circuits throughout the city.

Our adapted techniques were designed with HIV prevention information imbricated into the structure of games. Even as some of these exercises could not be recognized as strictly *Boalian*, they did resonate with the *Boalian* values that comprised the theater work. The system of techniques we implemented reflected the need to develop the classed and gendered body intending “to develop the expressive ability of the body” (Boal, 1979). Indeed, the choice of *Boalian* techniques for this program was based on Boal’s extensive work with marginalized bodies, subjective alienation, and the exploration of agency through theater practice. *Boalian* methods, both proper and as inspiration for adaptation, helped us create interactions with people who had little to no theatrical experience or performance skills. Within these techniques, borrowed heavily from forum-theater, we were able to create situations where audience members joined us in improvising situations and stories where together we could explore relationships, decision-making motivation, and rehearse their understanding and behavior in such situations in order to raise levels of self-consciousness during similar circumstances. With the *Boalian*, approach the body learns new manners of movement and agency. This proved effective for Project ABLE’s goals.

Specifically, methods from both *The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)* and *The Rainbow of Desire (RD)* provided two major principles that proved valuable in the effort to build a foundation for the new format. As Boal explains in RD, the use of these techniques is contingent upon an understating of the preliminary principles. It is important in the use of the RD method that facilitators understand the importance of the improvisational elements of the general methodology and the specific parameters that bind the improvisational structure. *Boalian*

improvisation is a means through which participants can begin to reflect upon, rethink, and rewrite moments of their experience. The improvisational process creates the opportunity to understand how these choices are made, and what dynamics exist in these choices will reveal to the facilitator of the process certain useful nuances the facilitator can employ.

In the framework, the *Boalian* trickster, or the facilitator, leads the group in an exploration of recurrent themes in the images. The point here is that the building of each character is a group process and relies upon a single individual that believes they understand the character and can inform the choices the character makes. The group, furthermore, in *Boalian* terms is defined as “spect-actors” to highlight that in this framework the line between positions of spectator and actor does not exist. One may begin, for example, as actor and transition to spectator or vice versa, depending on the spect-actor’s desire to play a character. The facilitator keeps participants aware of the connections between the characters and the performer’s individual experience. When players are in position, the facilitator asks each player to imagine the internal monologue of their character and to share it with other players in the scenario. Once enough of the story in the scenario has been established, the facilitator proceeds to help the actors animate the story.

The facilitator is also charged with the responsibility of leading the actors in the improvisational process to ensure that the protagonist’s perspective is developed in the scenario, and to guide the discovery of the points of the story that resonate with other spect-actors in the group. The facilitator must also help drive the process, keep both the actors and the participants engaged creatively, and create the parameters for the process. Often, to execute this piece of the process the facilitator must prove to be engaged and prepared with questions for the different players in the development of scenarios and sequences. These questions should center on the

characters actions, personalities, relationships to each other, their occupations, their motivations, habits, and the surrounding environment.

Project ABLE actors received this training on a weekly basis and with it the level of responsibility in running the workshops magnified. As might be expected, it was not an easy transition. The peer educator/actors were challenged by the increases in training, health intervention models, client centeredness, risk reduction, and behavior change. These models challenged the ensemble by offering more autonomy, more training to support that autonomy, more opportunities to exercise their own judgment and reflect on it with others, and more chances to be mindful and critical in their overall communication practices. Utilizing the improvisational theater processes and Boalian technique presented an opportunity to lead groups in exploring habits in decision-making. This intensified the level of work that the peer actors were required to participate in because now the work demanded that the actors sit with people and listen closely.

These models would require a dynamic engagement with audiences when coupled with the simultaneous improvisational theater training the ensemble was undergoing. Peer educators soon received paraprofessional counselor training as well as learning to recognize and discuss compulsive behavior, empowerment, healthy relationship dynamics, decision making, gender norms and behavior change. We were able to facilitate larger groups more effectively, create an environment where participants felt comfortable to speak about taboo subjects such as drugs, sex, and relationship issues, where they were validated and protected from judgment. Several members of the ensemble struggled to learn these new skills and were given the time to learn, while others quickly thrived with the new approaches.

Empowerment: Youth Actors / Adult Reflections

The peer educators' capacity to create relationships with the youth and adult audiences arose as an asset to the educational goals. When the performers were successful, the audience attached to the actors and wanted to share stories they had just seen unfold before them. They solicited advice and opened up about deeply personal issues they were reminded of during the performance. A successful show came to be defined by these terms. Peer educators would receive letters and calls constantly with questions, concerns, and an occasional marriage proposal.

Acuña took note of this and imagined that the theater group could create a link for deepening connections with youth that were seen during the performances. The popularity of the theater group then became an outreach method to invite youth to access the services at the Los Angeles Free Clinic. Eventually, Acuña approached the L.A. Free Clinic to add an HIV testing clinic to the program. She was among the first in the country to propose that youth HIV peer educators become certified to conduct HIV testing. The L.A. Free Clinic supported the idea despite some critics' wariness of putting youth in a position they imagined would be rather stressful and perhaps developmentally inappropriate. Acuña however was convinced that with enough training, guidance, and supervision, the peer educators were sufficiently intelligent and mature to be able to handle the responsibility.

The actor/peer educator team trained to be HIV counselors and began to see "clients" in house. The number of people who came in after these performances/workshops was remarkable to most involved. Often our shop talk would turn to the observations we were making about clients coming in multiple times and the shifts, even small at times, that they could see in their decision-making and in their sense of self confidence and self esteem. Of course, that wasn't the

case with every person who came, but it was for many. For several of the alumni of this program, the memories of the people we met in this process and the significance of what we were doing was not apparently lost on anyone.

Twenty-five years later, several former ensemble members speak about their tenure with great affection, respect, and passion. There is a common understanding among them that the constancy of the work was indeed a source of stress but their capacity to manage the intense responsibilities created a strong sense of their own confidence and competence; across the multiple generations of the ensemble, peers built a support system with each other that made them feel a part of something significant. One of the most common observations among the alumni is that their experience helped them develop communication skills, an ability to articulate ideas, listen to others, empathize, recognize their emotions and use those skills throughout their lives.

Upon reflection, this seems rooted in how the series of administrators chose to define the management hierarchy. Russell, Carrel, then Acuña each ensured that the youth involved were given a space to contribute to the development and the vision of the program without making tokens of their experience. Their efforts resulted in creating opportunities for the peers to be uniquely recognized as major contributors in the work. In addition to their impact on the youth clients, Project ABLE's explicit goals led to significant impacts upon those trying to meet those goals. Actors peer educators were employed to serve an adolescent population. Official program goals were not concerned with empowering the youth employees. Nonetheless, Russell, Carrel, and Acuña led the program with similar values regarding adolescents. The program administrators' personal investments led them to recognize that youth were capable of handling responsibility and pressure the caliber of work required of them. From almost the very inception

of Project ABLE, youth experience was treated with honesty, respect, and dignity, and youth were involved with the development of a program that validated the insight that youth peers brought to the program as a valuable asset.

Dialectical Theater and Empowerment

Further, the practice of improvisation became a key component of Project ABLE's efficacy, and coincidentally created a professional versatility among the youth performers that now seems to have translated into the personal realm. Youth became experts utilizing stage skills - improvisational skill, critical thinking, empathy, and managing highly stressful situations with a certain degree of poise - across several facets of their responsibilities - while performing, facilitating workshops, offering instruction on specific prevention methods, performing outreach in community-building spaces, and in negotiating resolutions to interpersonal conflicts with each other. Project ABLE's use of *Boalian*, adult learning, and dialogic facilitation methods increased pressure on the actor/peer educators to be perceptive and apply our best judgment in situations that had the potential to turn volatile and helped in defining the nuances within the responsibilities of our roles as performers, peer counselors, facilitators and health educators.

Indeed, using *Boalian* method affected the audiences by challenging perceptions of sexual behavior, teaching HIV information, and nurturing critical-thinking skills, but the need for the peers to understand this information and take responsibility for critical thinking had a tremendous impact on the actor/peer educators sense of personal values and self identity. The alumni have since assumed these as personal values and have continued to imbue them into how they understand their relationships and into their decision-making processes regarding personal and professional matters.

In retrospect, the development in training and collaboration emerged as the inadvertent element of the intervention that most deeply affected the actors. Being asked as a youth to contribute to the educational development and direction of the program was important to many peer educators who were also aware that their capacity to create a relationship was a vital asset that assisted in the development of the project's goals. Through various methods and strategies, the succeeding line of leadership in the program ritualized the notion of working collaboratively. Key to the methods of collaboration were creating a strong ensemble, actively building a safe space to share, and practicing dialogic communication within that ensemble to strengthen the dynamics of exchange and collaboration. As each leader stepped in, the integration of these concepts evolved further.

Critical Pedagogy and Empowerment

Project ABLE had a distinct audience and explicitly activist goals targeting that particular audience. Looking to pedagogical theorists, we come to understand that the level of contributions the peer educators were asked to make, in tandem with the skills that they were taught in order to support their work also offered them opportunities to learn skills that were applicable to their own empowerment. Specifically, Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux, Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade, Ernest Morrell, bell hooks, and Sandra Grande, all theorize the transgression of traditional power dynamics in the student-teacher relationship. Although Project ABLE did not frame the relationships between adults and youth as “teacher” and “student,” invariably the relationships did develop into lasting mentorships. Therefore, it is useful to review educational literature that defines the importance of structuralizing negotiations of power, authority, and ethics in relationships between teacher and student.

The work of the aforementioned authors is modeled after Paolo Freire's dialogic approach, which asks that all participate as equal co-learners to create social knowledge. The immediate goal of problem-posing is to develop critical thinking skills. In the long term, the goal is to cultivate critical thinking into critical consciousness among participants so that they are quipped to unpack the root causes of their own positionality. Pivotal in this is that people participate in identifying the issues to be addressed through critical dialogue, engage in dialogue processes to "critically assess social and historical roots of problems" in order to best envision strategies for lasting individual and community change. Generally, these critical pedagogy scholars also lend particular insight to the responsibilities teaching artists have to a standard of critical self-reflection in community engagement. They recommend that such self-awareness be dialectical and informed through an understanding of the limits, obligations, and ethics of critical educational practices in marginalized communities.

Collective Identity and Empowerment

Collective identity mobilization theory, a subset of empowerment theory I explained in the previous chapter, builds on another Freirean concept: critical consciousness. Critical consciousness describes an active utilization of critical thinking skills as they are applied to individual and structural levels of experience. The previous passage explained the relationship between the administrators as educator/mentors and the youth through critical pedagogy. Now I wish to build on this by turning our attention to theorizing the relationships of the peer actors to each other.

Toorjo Ghose's and his colleague's work regarding collective identity mobilization, as explained in the previous chapter, explains the formation of empowerment occurs simultaneous

to 1) the formation of “boundaries [which] differentiate” a mobilized group from outsiders; 2) collaborative work that infuses its meaning in a group identification, and 3) “the negotiation of identity where it is made visible and politicized to the outside world” (Ghose, et al, 312). The story described earlier about the peer actors’ growing sense of confidence and authority in highly stressful situations through their work with Project ABLE, illustrates these ideas from the BCN model. Key to the model is that a sense of cohesion and group identity grows while social agents engage in working toward a mutual goal that directly opposes “institutions and societal processes outside the group” (Ghose, et al, 313). In the course of collaborating on shared goals, a set of shared values emerges. These values speak to the priorities of working together against a dominant outside group. As the work develops, the group becomes aware of sharing an identity that is rooted in “their group affiliation and collective action” (Ghose, et al, 314) and this contributes to a shared sense of social capital that did not previously exist. This level of empowerment derives from the interactions with each other on the shared goal.

The next aspect of the BCN models explains how empowerment develops against the opposition faced by a group. The Ghose model explains how the sharing of personal narratives is pivotal to collective empowerment. As a window into the experience of society, personal stories develop a shared meaning in that they contribute to the development of a new critical consciousness about society. The sharing of these stories and asserting the reality faced within the stories is a challenge to the dominant group, a political articulation of individual and collective identity, to others. This is the important aspect of this component, which is that sharing with an outside of group, either a “receptive” (Ghose, et al, 314) group or an “oppositional” (Ghose, et al, 314) one on community issues while utilizing personal narratives forging a group identity, cultivates relational social capital, and increases group empowerment.

Sometimes I worry that arts engagement follows too closely a model of traditional education, which does not prioritize critical thinking. Alarming, education in public urban schools is more frequently than ever overwhelmed with standardized testing. Youth are not learning how to navigate nor negotiate the social systems surrounding them. An artist working in community-based engagement must immerse her- or himself in the history and tradition of the community, because for an artist with this opportunity, immersing oneself can mean offering a young person a rare opportunity to reframe and redefine the world they live within. Also, learning to understand context means learning to understand how the operations of oppression will change, almost imperceptibly, according to the identity they are operating against.

Chapter 2

STAHR! Somebody's Talking About HIV Risk!

In 2003, after working in HIV services for twelve years, I was recruited by Ximena Morgan, Director of Programs at Los Angeles Shanti, one of the oldest AIDS service organizations in the United States. She was familiar with me from the field and felt confident that I could help revitalize an ambitious youth art-based HIV intervention project. The program, Somebody's Talking About HIV Risk! (STAHR!), marked the organization's move to include youth among their client base. LA Shanti established a reputation as a provider of Emotional Support Services (ESS) to adults dying of AIDS in the first decade of the epidemic. They expanded services as patients began to respond to highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), the AIDS cocktail treatment. They created a strong community comprised of their initial hospice patients, their families, and loved ones. The organization had to make seismic shifts in its service culture, however, to accommodate HIV prevention services to youth. The initial team of staff that was put together found the contract obligations to be a daunting challenge for the program to reach all if its contractual goals for several reasons, including a limited number of staff available with the necessary skillset to fulfill an immense scope of work.

LA Shanti first opened its doors as a non-profit in 1983, offering emotional support services in the form of one-to-one counseling and peer support groups for adult gay male, predominantly white, populations that were impacted during the first years of the AIDS epidemic in Los Angeles county. In the early years of the disease, the organization proved vital in creating a community of advocacy and support for those dying and for others advocating on their behalf for research and treatment. Their work inspired immense loyalty. Most volunteers for the organization began their relationship during a time of great urgency and vulnerability, so joining

with LA Shanti became a tactic of self-preservation as they lost loved ones or found themselves dealing with terminal prognoses. This remained the case for several years, until 1996 when HAART became widely available and initiated a definable shift in the need for services among those affected by HIV and AIDS.

Context: Responding to the Field

In the same period the availability of HAART helped the initially infected populations survive longer, the risk rates among other populations increased drastically. In its first decade, LA Shanti's ESS program was supported predominantly by private donations from major donors who were family and friends of affected loved ones. As patients began to live longer, the private donations dwindled at an alarming rate. National and local demographics of those affected by the disease shifted, followed by the priorities of the public funding streams. These events set the stage for the request for proposals issued by the Los Angeles County Department of Health, Office of AIDS Program and Policy, Office of Minority Health and the Office of Women's Health to call for new programs targeting women, people of color, and youth. In pursuing public and government monies to fund programs, LA Shanti considered expanding their client base.

John Copeland, the Program Director at the time with L.A. Shanti decided to apply for a youth HIV prevention grant, intrigued by this shifting landscape. Copeland submitted several grant proposals that year, in 1999, to the Los Angeles County Health Department, Office of AIDS Programs and Policies (OAPP) for several new programs, including STAHR!. L.A. Shanti had inherited another youth program, by this time, the CITY Youth project, a drop-in program founded by the City of West Hollywood designed to create an educational social space for lesbian, gay, and bisexual identifying youth. Copeland intended to create a program design that

would, to his summation, reinvigorate the HIV education message to include “something other than sex and condoms” (Copeland, interview), which he believed was not effective with broader youth populations.

Copeland was interested in having youth engage in conversations that addressed the complicated issues around negotiating safer sex practices. He wanted to encourage youth to practice advocating for themselves in romantic and sexual relationships while also recognizing the complexities of human sexuality. He did not rely on a particular model of health or HIV education, to complete his design, but rather took the opportunity to lend his prior training as an actor and his training in AIDS services to inform his sense of what could potentially be effective. Copeland submitted the proposal for the STAHR! program, wherein he described the program as a series of 24-week workshop sessions with 60 youth participants (30 young men who have sex with men and 30 young women at sexual risk); the 24 sessions would end with the production of a short film relevant to HIV prevention; Thirty youth from these workshops, would complete peer education training in preparation of leading discussion workshops for three hundred youth featuring the films.

Although L.A. Shanti was not a member of the Los Angeles youth social services network discussed in the previous chapter, but L.A. Shanti and the Los Angeles Free Clinic were members of the larger network of AIDS service organizations in the area, which further expanded the frames of reference for HIV prevention work models. Copeland had been involved with HIV services for ten years at the time and had been familiar with arts interventions, including Project ABLE. He proceeded to design the project as part of the grant proposal: Thirty youth would participate in weekly workshops. These sessions would be performance and lecture based, building toward the production of short films at the end of the sessions. As previously

mentioned, Copeland was familiar with ABLE, but he decided against seeking funding to support a youth theater group because of several factors: the logistical complications involved with supporting a team that large he thought would be unrealistic for LA Shanti to sustain; and he believed there would be greater potential to reach a broader audience with a film.

Furthermore, Copeland thought the money point was vital to the success of the program. He sought money to pay youth a stipend for their participation for two reasons: First, the stipend would serve as an “incentive to keep them invested and present”(Copeland, interview). Second, he hoped to distribute the resources and create a system of professional networking where the youth could be placed in “jobs for the youth in [the] entertainment [industry]” (Copeland, interview). LA Shanti and Copeland secured the grant and began the first year of the program in 2000.

The Shifting Landscape

The rest of the agency was experiencing some difficult consequences simultaneous to the implementation of STAHR! The developmental shift transformed the economic and racial landscape igniting an identity crisis, of sorts, among several members of the board of directors. It was an awkward experience for Ximena Morgan, the Director of Research and Evaluation at this time. She was a staff member with a long relationship with the organization, frequently taken into the confidence of several individual board members and invited to Board meetings where she witnessed similar troubling sentiments during official conversations that could be construed as “racist” (Morgan, interview). She observed first hand that the executive leadership felt unprepared to lead the organization into a new era of serving communities of color despite having eagerly pursued the shift in programming to maintain the relevance of the agency. This

ambivalence would only grow with their anxieties, and in turn, it would create a tense environment for the program staff. The management staff attempted to be proactive and coordinated diversity awareness trainings for both the frontline staff and the members of the Board of Directors to foster an appreciation of differences and open the pathways of communication between both factions.

Meanwhile, within the STAHR! project the small team of staff struggled to implement the entirety of the program with a single program coordinator, a part-time producer, and two consulting artists. In retrospect, their lack of experience working with youth in community-based settings predicted the difficulty they would have reaching the program goals. As was mentioned the funding contract, included an extensive scope of work that created multiple measurable goals for each of the three broad phases (twenty-four week workshop, peer education training, community film discussion workshops, including a program requirement that the youth participate from multiple areas of Los Angeles county). Combined, the contract required staff to conduct over four hundred distinct interventions annually where youth demonstrated an increase in their HIV knowledge base, a positive shift in their perceptions of self-confidence, and improved attitudes toward safer sex. For approximately eighteen months, the staff was unsuccessful in reaching the number of successful interventions required in the contractual agreements.

OAPP granted LA Shanti the contract, but with the contingency that staff would submit a curriculum for the program within the first year of its initiation, including the training curriculum for participants preparing to become peer educators. The decision to give the organization the grant despite not having a final curriculum was based on two factors: the strong promise of the proposal and the immense reputation of the organization. Therefore, the staff began with a

vague sense of what might work in the workshop to meet their goals and were given a certain freedom to experiment with the content. The first of the twenty-four week cycle workshop sessions went well, although the other program phases, e.g., peer education training and film discussion workshops were not implemented. What's more, specific goals for the twenty-four, eight-hour sessions were non-existent. Over the course of the two cycles, the curriculum consisted of little more than actor training. Staff turnover would eventually add to the factors hindering the progress, as multiple individuals cycled through with little experience and less understanding of how to proceed with the program demands. As new staff cycled through, with the many pressures upon them to reach the multileveled goals, they began to rely on youth participants to recruit friends instead of recruiting new youth for each twenty-four-week cycle. As a result, a homogenous group of youth, who were predominantly there for the acting training, repeatedly comprised each cohort during the first phase.

By the time I joined the project in 2003, participants did not reflect the target group stipulated by the grant. With regard to serving a particular demographic, many actually expressed in project surveys that they were not concerned about HIV risk. The group consisted primarily of aspiring actors who were not necessarily in the target demographic, were on the more mature end of the sixteen to twenty-four year old spectrum, and were mostly uninterested in becoming peer educators because it did not involve an acting component. After a few weeks of assessment, I decided to make fundamental programmatic changes as well as prepare the official curriculum with a colleague, Raquel Monroe. The viability of these changes would require participating youth to take ownership of all levels of the program. Thus, it became imperative that existing participants know their investment in the program was dearly valued and they were welcomed to remain with the program.

I invited the participants to stay involved by collaborating on the development of the new curriculum and held several meetings with participants to solicit their input. During this period, those committed to the goals remained involved, while those who weren't transitioned out of the program to pursue other interests. The youth that remained had been through a long unstable fourteen-month period and had a few questions about changing the program, unsure of what such changes would mean. Several were eager to see someone stabilize the program, train them to become peer educators, and help them showcase the films to community audiences.

Context in Pedagogy

The provided input that highlighted the weaknesses I observed coming in to the program—that the lack of a curriculum, and the lack of a pedagogical ideology failed the overall goals and failed to lead the participants through a critical reflection of decision-making processes, critical thinking skills, and human (adolescent) sexuality. With their support, I worked to fortify these elements of the program, and finalized the new curriculum in three months. The newly designed workshops employed visual art, performance, and improvisational theater techniques to address the issues of media and youth, relationship dynamics, gender roles, sexual taboos and stigma, identity and culture, effective communication strategies, self-expression and self-confidence in order to help participants build critical consciousness and critical thinking skills. These components would be the skills at the root of youth developing the capacity to develop sexual negotiation skills. The vision strategically synthesized principles of youth empowerment, health promotion, and critical arts pedagogy.

The Centers for Disease Control establish HIV priorities for federal grant monies and define certain categories of populations that are programming priorities. They had evolved the

system of categorizing populations from the time period when Lisa Russell was founding Project ABLE. By 2003, the CDC had revised the category names in the attempt to identify behavioral risks of infection. They recognized two categories of risks among youth, which were *young men who have sex with men* (YMSM) and *young women at sexual risk*. LA Shanti was beginning to work with these clientele populations for the first time when they implemented STAHR!.

These risk categories are defined by risk factors pertinent to the socialization of their respective genders and sexual orientations. Conversations about sex, sexuality, and risk behavior would have to rely on a complicated process of building trust to support extremely personal conversations about sexual desire and behavior. However, when I joined the group, the program mixed both of these groups into one cycle. Mixing the groups, meant that the group used time that could be used otherwise, to manage the groups responses to the others experiences. I assessed that this did not serve any of the goals and was actually counter-productive to them. Therefore, I made a decision regarding program design to separated the category groups and create distinct curricula for each population. I believed this would support a workshop session that would effectively address the risk factors of either group utilizing discussion based and art based explorations.

Monroe and I designed the program with a focus on the representation of marginalized groups in popular media. We attempted to address the negative images and values established in popular media regarding sex by leading youth through multiple forms of theater and movement based explorations. We hoped to historicize contemporary media representations of the youths' respective sexual identities and make connections to previous US based art activist. Specifically, we hoped to draw the youths' attention to art activist works' efforts to address the representation of populations similar to the youths'. First, in developing the young men's curriculum, the focus

was the historical turn of marginalized people toward the artistic mediums of theatre, film, music, poetry, and dance to create political responses to civil injustice and oppression.

Prominent examples we referred to, in order to justify design changes to OAPP referred to arts movements by marginalized populations:

“Harlem Renaissance of the 1930’s and the Black Arts Movement of the 1960’s, [where] African American artists utilize[d] poetry, dance, theatre and music to articulate resistance to notions of inferiority and to create positive representations of African American people” (Delgado and Monroe, 2002).

The contract monitors from OAPP held the authority to approve or disprove changes to all details that were agreed to in the original contract with L.A. Shanti. OAPP was overseeing very few arts based programs at the time (one of the few in Los Angeles county was the aforementioned Project ABLE). Thus, contract monitors had several questions asking us to justify our requests to change the program structure, including a pointed inquiry to explain the reason for my request to redirect monies to the short film production.

Monroe and I proceeded to historicize AIDS art practice and the film production in order to contextualize the significance of creating a professional quality production as a component of the arts intervention. Therefore, we explained that the additional resources would assist us in creating a professional grade film. There were two benefits to this. First, increasing the scale of the production would have a profound impact on the sense of accomplishment for the youth participants. Second, the professional quality of the film would create opportunities for the program to submit the film into festivals and pursue wider support for the program.

To further establish the legacy of arts activism, Monroe and I leaned on David Roman’s, *Acts of Intervention*, to help establish the legacy of AIDS activist art intervention created in the 1980s to demonstrate the government’s failure to provide funds for AIDS research and health care; and to memorialize those lost in the epidemic,” when the disease first devastated the United

States. Additionally, Roman argues in this text, that diverse representation of gay men in “AIDS performances” challenged the “media’s portrayal of gay men as deviant and disease ridden” (Delgado and Monroe, 2002).

To justify the need to split the groups of young women and young men in order to accomplish the educational goals and raise the visibility of each at risk group we developed a series of more sophisticated themes addressing the specific experiences of the target populations in media representations. We explained the importance of doing so within the context of countering the standard representations of gay men and women at risk. We relied on Roman again to illustrate the portrayal of women and HIV in media:

“[T]he predominate discourse portrayed in the media on HIV/AIDS divides women into two groups-those who are (like gay men) considered to be [the] cause of infection and those who need to be protected. Hence the media [...] create[s] sentimental representations of HIV positive middle class white women and children to make the epidemic palpable to Middle America” (Roman, 1998).

Such “sentimental representations” effectively ignored the impact of the disease on women of color as it edged them into the category of “cause of infection” (Roman, 1998). At the time, and as of this writing in 2015, women of color, specifically black and Latina women are diagnosed with AIDS at a rate extremely disproportionate to their white counterparts. The largest risk category for woman is sex with a male partner. Media had had a legacy of hyper-sexualizing women of color and continued to sensationalize their “other”-ness by distorting these two facts. The result was a further exoticizing of black and Latina women’s sexuality. When white women’s risk was discussed widely, the general cultural response was to protect and reinforce the resources available to prevent further infection. However, when women of color were identified at being at-risk there was an absence of the same generalized response (Roman, 1998).

The OAPP contract monitor reviewed the curriculum with this new material for three weeks. During this period, we received several intermittent requests for revisions in response to various questions about the art intervention while the contract monitor reviewed the current draft. Our request to redirect funds to the filmmaking process drew the most attention from OAPP. Their attention to these details was explained to me as a result of the previously weak demonstration of program. They eventually approved the new budget once these questions were answered to their satisfaction.

STAHR! Process Design

Monroe and I designed the curriculum to switch focus on process—developing trust, building teamwork, and developing interpersonal reflections on personal stories. Our choice to do this relied heavily on the mentor artists modeling dialogic communication skills with each other and with the youth. We believed this to be the most effective model to teach the skills because this would create opportunities for the youth to practice them. Their capacity to build these skills in program would optimize the potential for them to utilize these skills in their personal lives and, most importantly in their sexual relationships.

The fundamental tenet of the program with the new curriculum would be to challenge the representation of sexuality in popular film by creating original film narratives generated from a perspective that resonated, respectively, with each set of participants. Group participants in the new design met for six hours, once a week for twenty-four weeks. An interdisciplinary approach worked as the framework for every workshop session. Visual and performance arts engagement was used as a tool to explore individual empowerment and community-building elements. Each session began with the participants answering “the question of the day.” This question was

intended to stimulate a contemplation of the day's overall topic, and offer an opportunity for the adult mentors to assess the emotional baseline of the participants as a gauge for making adjustments throughout the rest of the day's agenda. These check-ins, were then followed by the six hour workshops for fifteen consecutive weeks.

During the fifteen weeks, the participants were led through an exploration of their personal understanding of HIV risk factors, including notions of sexuality, identity, empowerment, relationships, and decision-making. In each session, the artist facilitators led the participants through writing, acting, movement, and discussion sessions. The latter were designed to introduce youth to the informational and personal components regarding HIV, relationship dynamics, power, and identity. Movement and acting were then designed to support and explore related facets of these components. Writing sessions were designed to directly generate original material for the film script. Session sixteen was a preparation session where youth would meet with their artist mentors to clarify the responsibilities and expectations in anticipation of the film collaboration, including a rehearsal for the actors with the director. Sessions seventeen to nineteen were comprised of a three-day shoot for the short film.

Finally, in sessions twenty to twenty-three, the participants received training on the HIV curriculum development and facilitation skills to prepare for the educational workshops with the film. The final meeting, session twenty-four was the graduation ceremony. The morning during that session, facilitators led participants through a closing process, followed by an exercise to create a "year in the life" plan. This life plan was a short story the youth were to write which required them to imagine where they would like to be in a year, and write in detail about the steps they would have to complete in order to achieve their goals. In the afternoon, friends and

family were invited for a graduation ceremony, where youth were individually recognized and awarded Certificates of Completion.

STAHR!'s inaugural three-year contract period ended in June 2003, four weeks into the young women's phase. OAPP decided to offer us a six-month extension of the contract to complete the young women's session and to assess the progress. The program staff administered pre-test and post-test surveys during the first run of the young women's workshop in 2003. The data reflected that after attending the peer education trainings youth demonstrated an improved level of participation, commitment, and an increase in self-esteem, decision-making, and behavior change. When the program demonstrated this marked turn around, OAPP extended the contract term another six months. They added that they planned to renew the program funding the next fiscal year for another three-year contract period based upon the shift in design and the increased level of participation. They were interested in allowing the new design time to explore its potential.

The reasons for this increase in results can be attributed to several factors. First, the workshop format focused on creating dialogue throughout every component of the program, thereby fostering a sense of respect, risk-taking, and open discussion. Youth in this environment began to discuss issues which affected them and which they cared about. They also were given the task of supporting each other during this process. In this environment of mutual sharing and respect, the young women felt more confident to make healthier decisions regarding their lives. They were better able to imagine making bolder choices to advocate for themselves later in life.

Artist Mentorship and Collaboration

The instructional team consisted of myself, as the Program Director and Lead Arts Facilitator, an acting instructor, writing instructor, dance instructor, and an art design instructor. I recruited artists who had worked previously in community-based settings and tried to conscientiously create a team with a diverse spectrum of experience, backgrounds, ethnicities, ages, and language skills to better reflect the experiences of the youth. We began to meet several weeks before the program began and I shared my vision of the pedagogy, the goals, and the approach to creating youth-adult relationships. I introduced the staff to the dialogic model and explained that the goal of doing this was to ensure that the adults understood 1) their responsibility for decentralizing the power imbalance inherent in youth-adult relationships and 2) how they would be expected to do accomplish this. I had assembled a team of experienced artists in their fields, experienced teachers, whom held personal beliefs that valued young people, and expressed a personal commitment to developing an environment of mutual respect. For some the dialogic model was an extension of their own personal practice, and for others it presented a worthwhile opportunity to expand their skillset. Together, we worked to create an atmosphere where respect would be paramount; everyone understood the importance of extending their respect for all individual's input, that forthright honesty would be welcomed and that all questions were valued. Adults and youth working together was of the utmost importance to create a sense of safety and, in turn, a sense of responsibility for the complexity of the individual challenges the program required of each person, the group goals, and the scale of work that they were undertaking.

For example, during the first workshop meeting, I led a group brainstorm asking people to discuss their definitions of respect. I also asked them to describe what being respected by others looked like specifically. We created a list of "community agreements" from this

discussion. Then I asked the group to review the list and reflect on whether each of them individually could agree these, to raise questions now so we could discuss. The point was to make sure they all understood that we each would be responsible for observing these. The final list, included for example: be on time; listen actively to others; promise to not share anybody else's business outside of this room; ask questions, turn off your cell phone, share your opinions and ideas; show up; have patience; dress so you can move around; ask for a community meeting if something is really not working for you; you can pass on any activity or exercise you want to; read about the goal for the day before you come into the room; try all the exercises at least once before you pass; no gossiping about people; don't be shy about conflicts; try to have fun; get a good night sleep the night before we get together.

I would lead group discussions every few weeks to discuss whether the group was adhering to these "community agreements" to assess the group's development. Some individuals found it difficult to adhere to these, so they needed support to reflect on their conduct and redefine their interactions. Participants often took the opportunity to share their self-assessments. Once or twice in either group, they would decide to edit the list to make adjustments they deemed more appropriate for our goals. For instance, have fun might be changed to keep an open mind and challenge yourself to participate. As might be expected, these discussions required significant portions of time. This provided a structured method to cultivate thoughtful participation and accountability, which was the primary benefit to this strategy. It also guided them in discussing interpersonal dynamics with the people they knew both inside and outside of the workshop doors. After four weeks of group discussions, the youth began to speak with each other about concepts such as community, active listening, and personal responsibility.

Next, we had specific priorities regarding the film. We planned to generate a new script based on the lives of the participants, design the soundtrack according to their wishes, and create moments where all of the participants would appear onscreen. This made writing the film script a complicated process because our team was committed to developing images that explicitly challenged popular media's tendency to objectify women and represent them as witless or frivolous. Our narrative arc needed to honor our female lead's intelligence and reflect her individuality, while also showing how she grappled with a difficult decision. The screenwriter, Cheray O'Neal committed to this process and worked closely with myself, the Program Director, to make sure the story served the goal of the project. We needed the final film to serve as a teaching tool that created challenges for the audiences to think critically. We also wanted to produce a script that offered a balanced of critical and entertaining elements in the effort to be accessible to youth audiences. The challenge that I understood in contrast to Project ABLE was the lack of a live cast that I believed inspired connections in a manner that a film might struggle to accomplish. O'Neal had many priorities to balance in creating a dynamic protagonist.

Power and Media

With this particular program, power and the imbalance of it were placing external pressures on administering the program. Within, the program staff attempted to assist youth in developing skills to explicitly navigate the institutional power structures creating the social conditions which influenced their own lives—namely as racism, sexism, heteronormativity, homophobia, classism, and the bias against youth, age-ism. Therefore a closer analysis of STAHR! offers insight into the role of systemic power and the manner with which it can influence and affect community-based practices.

First, STAHR! provided youth an alternative to the existing relationships they had with adults. The program space created a buffer for the youth between themselves and the authoritarian institutions they participated in, such as school, their jobs, the medical system, general relief, sometimes family, etc. Indeed, many of the youth participants expressed how impressive it was for them to interact with adults whom they could relate to, who had similar backgrounds as them, and who recognized them as equals. This feedback was based on several factors. In the young women's cohort, they had grown accustomed to seeing only male figures in positions of authority at home, in school, and in their broader social spheres. They were not accustomed to seeing women of color, in positions of authority, and their understanding of art was significantly shaped by the absence of artists who were people of color.

Popular media representations were also significant factors in teaching them that people of color only participated in "urban" and "craft" arts. These factors contributed to a general sense that they could not pursue a career in the arts because they had never seen anyone like them (from a similar cultural background, ethnicity, neighborhood, class, or gender) who had succeeded. In prior instances when they had expressed an interest in the arts, they were often told that it was "not practical" (Catalán, interview).

I must emphasize the growing impact that popular media continues to have upon adolescence and youth perspectives in the United States, particularly with urban youth. Most salient is the degree of influence that media has on youth perceptions of self, community, and positionality within the context of a global society. For youth in general, popular media is the singular source influencing their notions of *art*, *artist*, and the *value of art*. In every project I have worked with (since my practice began in 1991 to the time that I sit writing in 2015), youth rely on what they have seen in popular culture, such as film, television, music videos, and now

other content via online platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, Vine, SnapChat, Netflix, OnDemand, FreeProjectTV, etc.

Their lives are so saturated in popular media images to the degree that when they are asked to contribute ideas and opinions in collaborative contexts, they draw from popular culture. This tends to be the case, across various art genres and regardless of the tasks set before them, e.g., writing, developing narratives for characters, set design, sound design, visual art, mural making, photography, film-making, editing, song-writing, singing, choreography, costume design, etc. Indeed, facilitating discussions regarding media has become a huge component of my work as an arts facilitator—I often lead discussions to unpack the reasons they contribute the ideas they offer. To that end, I frequently ask what is the popular media they are consuming?; What are the messages about people in that media?; How does media portray their identities? Why does popular media represent certain identities so consistently narrowly?

Media Representation of Identity

Their perception of the world and of their roles within it is not an accident. Multiple systems meticulously cultivate a narrow understanding of reality among urban, working class, and youth of color. The most prominent among these is US popular media, where they are frequently represented in limited roles. Many changes have occurred in the past twenty-five years in response to changing technological and commercial landscapes and since 2003, the media has become a much more complicated factor for youth than in previous decades. Older media sources have evolved in the attempt to maintain their relevance while new media platforms have gained enormous popularity and the impact upon youths' lives has amplified exponentially. Television networks have expanded their programming, offering multiple alternatives to ensure

consumers access content at their convenience: traditional channels, online video streaming; and internet based content designed to complement television content. The radio broadcasting industry, as an example, has been drastically altered in the attempt to avoid obsolescence, where they now offer online video content to accompany its audio broadcasts.

Overall, mainstream marketing targets the adolescent market. Youth of color, specifically, are targeted so aggressively that research reflects younger generations have “never known what it is to not be a consumer” (Roberts and Foehr, 2009). According to the Pew Center’s 2010 study on race in the media, although people and youth of color have grown in numbers in the US and have continued to develop a more visible presence in popular media, it is still a disproportionately small presence (Guskin, 2010).

This is the foundation for a deeper bias in popular media. The absence of complicated representation, amplifies the signification of those images that are created and available. The result is a historical pattern of representing race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, and class identities in media that implicitly recapitulates Eurocentric patriarchal values. Ella Shohat’s and Robert Stam’s work illustrate this. They track the evolution of racial tropes, which began in early print media and have evolved to digital media. They argue the fundamental power of commercial media is to deploy a colonialist ideology, where Europe is centered and racialized others are marginalized. Popular media standardizes the marginalization of people of color in racial tropes and creates the template for a global perception of people of color (Shohat and Stam, 1994) as “other.”

Mainstream US media outlets expand their brands and aggressively market to young urban black and Latino populations, one of the largest consumer demographics of popular media (Gordon, 1994). However, content continues to reinforce race and class stereotypes even as

media industries attempt to avoid alienating the existing dominant white youth markets (Guskin, 2010). The result is youth of color are increasingly consumers of mainstream media that reproduces their experiences and identities in reductive tropes that fit within market demands (Levine, 1990). These tropes portray youth of color as criminal, violent, tragic, pitiable, clownish, over-sexed, ignorant, or ineducable. Moreover, white youth are constructed in a manner that contrasts these characteristics, predicating white identity on being the polar opposite of “other”: intelligent, complicated, sympathetic, redeemable. Within these conditions, urban, poor, working class youth’s participation in mass media culture is limited to consumption where they unwittingly become complicit in the commodification of urban identities and aesthetics.

The consistency of these images and tropes has ideological and interpersonal ramifications for youth. Their frequency naturalizes the stereotypes they contain and forecloses the development of complicated understandings of their lived experience. The ramifications of this exist at both the intrapersonal and the structural levels. The tone of media bolsters dominant ideology, supporting structural oppressions, and permitting biased attitudes against marginalized adolescent identities. Among those who are marginalized, intrapersonal effects include a weakened sense of self-esteem (Gordon, 1994), ambition, aspiration, and self-advocacy.

Connections: Media, Film, and Identity

There are several theoretical tactics to understand the connection between media, film, moving image, and identity development. I’d like to begin with film theory to understand the facets of popular media that impact the construction of the world. Following film theory, I’d like to employ philosophy, specifically scholars developing a phenomenological understanding about the visibility of identity. Both of these literatures help expand the understanding of the

mechanisms through which media impact the construction of the world. They also help determine the strategies to challenge the hegemonic agendas these mechanisms currently serve, in the effort to help youth develop a critical approach to engaging with and processing such material.

There are certain scholars whose work, when combined, helps to create a sense of the why the media has such a significant impact on the perception of self and the world among. Critical film scholars, particularly David MacDougall, Vivian Sobchack, and Elena del Río posit a relationship between human body as viewer and filmic body as viewed that is a responsive one. Accordingly, the relationship between the sensorial and the cognitive processes of the body is non-hierarchical, placing the experience of film viewership in an equitable relationship to the experience of the material world. The notion highlights the lived body as a sense-making subject and a material object, simultaneously, making sense of and having sense in the world.

First, David MacDougall, a film theorist explains that the fundamental power of film is a non-linguistic “triangular reflexivity” (2006) that is constructed from photo, photographer, and subject. MacDougall theorizes that film involves several bodies including the actor-subject body, spectator body, filmmaker body, and the symbolic body of the film, which consists of both the material of the film and the physiological responses stimulated by it. Spectators develop a corporeal identification with film through the simultaneous emotionally and physically responses stimulated by the events witnessed. This relationship between film and audience is built on the “interplay of stimulus and bodily response between screen and spectator” (MacDougall, 2006). According to MacDougall, the significance of film lies in its ability to offer the spectator a multisensory experience, which creates meaning outside of symbolic language. This understanding of the sensorial engagement of film is consistent across scholars.

Del Río and Sobchack, more specifically, theorize that human body and film body in this relationship are each of a literal and a figurative significance. Similar to MacDougall, del Río and Sobchack explain the collective aspects, aside from the material, which are perceptible to the human senses, are indeed, the body of the film. This body is distinct from both the body of the viewer and the filmmaker, existing in the reflexive response of the viewer to it. This conception depends upon an understanding that experience is grounded in a notion of the body where it is our access to and of the world. Sobchack, therefore, argues that the lived experience of film is a “real” experience in the same manner that is traditionally assigned to experiences of the material world.

In establishing this point, Sobchack underscores the significance of how the sensorial registers of the body “understand” the film experience. Sobchack posits that there is a “commutative reversibility between subjective feeling and objective knowledge” (Sobchack, 2004), where a continuous relating across the senses that stipulates each register of the senses is in a state of constant exchange, always contributing to the procedural processing of the other. Del Río and Sobchack build from this notion of continuity to explain the lived body as simultaneously an objective body, which is also lived subjectively.

Primary for film viewing, vision is part of a system of completely simultaneous sensorial experience. In the process of film reception, the body of viewer and film challenge the fixed nature of each other in their ability to bring the other “into being” (Sobchack, 2004) in the moment of viewing. The human body’s experience of the film stimulates the sensorial registers without distinguishing that the experience is distanced through the viewing. The intellectual awareness of place and of the distance—that the individual is not in the situation portrayed on screen—is what distinguishes the sensual filmic experience in contrast to a direct, literal, and

material sensual experience. Del Río and Vivian Sobchack argue that processing the intellectual and the sensorial experiences of a film engage semiotic and linguistic systems of cognition distinctly. The body makes meaning from the textures and the texts of the world it experiences cognitively by the simultaneous processing of thought and the commutation of sensorial experience.

Senses commute without thought and sensorium process is the accumulation of “the data of the different senses” (Sobchack, 2004). The lived body, the ground of experience, is both conscious subject and materiality. The material object as site of the sensoria is always involved in a labyrinthine system where each sensual mode serves as architect to a complex structure creating access to the world. The sensual modes of the sensoria are always already interactive, commutative, and operating simultaneously; and the conscious subject is always mediated, is never in an innate state of being. Thus, the conscious self emerges from the blur between subjectivity and objectivity, where the body experiences meaning and the consciousness self-consciously attaches meaning.

Regarding the experience of film, Sobchack proposes a “cinesthetic subject” that engages in reflective, self-aware thought that is informed by the carnal thought of the sensorial. Understanding the location of subjectivity for Sobchack requires explaining the relationship between “body and cinematic representation, between the literal and the figural” (Sobchack, 2004). The “as if” quality, that movies are often said to provide audiences, is an expression of the “ambivalence and confusion of our senses” (Sobchack, 2004) and has a phenomenological structure. This structure, she explains, is grounded in the relational interchange of “flesh and consciousness that is the lived body” (Sobchack, 2004). When audience members speak to viewing an image or sequence from film, concurrently, the intellect is aware that the body sits in

a seat or stands watching a moving image, while the body responds to the stimuli of image, sound, the movement of the camera, or the onscreen body in a state of distress, crying, aroused “as if” the body were being stimulated directly, without the distance of the film representation.

In this manner, the content of the popular media begins to plant itself in the perception of youth, where their experience of it is equivalent to their experience of the material world and the messages imbued within are as “real” as the lessons they learn from their material experiences. Sobchack’s notion that the film viewer perceives the on screen sensual object as “my own” (Sobchack, 2004) subjectively felt lived experience of the body, is engaged in a bodily reflexivity, where the body is in a constant readiness explains that the subject is always prepared to make sense out of the world that it encounters and to be a sensual part of the world for other bodies. This underscores the perceptual impact that media has upon youth’s comprehension of the world through film. In this section, I have interrogated how media constructs representations of marginalized identities, how our sensorial understanding of the filmic body means that we experience media “as if” it is a “real” experience, and how these factors in combination mold youths’ perceptions of the world. Next, I would like to expound upon one facet of the sensorial register, the visible to further support how the visibility of identity molds marginalized youth’s perceptions of their own identities

Visible Identities

In the consideration of bodily reflexivity, I turn to Linda Martín Alcoff and Jeffrey Weate to further consider the subjective impact of visible identity. Alcoff and Weate recuperate the philosophical study of lived experience by reviewing Frantz Fanon’s work through a new lens of critical phenomenology. Their work paves the way for investigating the lived experience of

visible identities, and in particular, the lived experience of being viewed as the primary process through which identity is assigned. The body, within the visual registers, is both the subject and the object of a perceptual practice, which evolves from multiple historico-cultural schema. The body in this practice is assigned affective and corporeal markers that echo historical notions of race, gender, sexuality, and ability. The assignment of these to the embodied self contributes to our sense of our own bodies and the bodies of others.

Alcoff leans on critical race theory as the basis of her arguments to build this critical perspective of phenomenology. Three basic positions for her work are 1) race is not real; 2) race is always politically salient and always the most important element of identity; and 3) race is socially constructed historically, malleable, culturally contextual, and produced through learned perceptual practice. Alcoff posits that race as a lens can be used to highlight current social conditions imposed by the reality of racialized experience. She agrees with the anti-essentialist argument that racial formations may change and are not natural. Ultimately, her assertion is that racialized identity is a materially lived experience even as it undergoes a process of production, constancy, and transformation through social belief.

At the root of both Alcoff's and Weate's work is the notion of a postural body. The postural body is constructed through Gail Weiss' notion of body image. Engaging with Merleau-Ponty, Weiss describes body image or body schema as the awareness we have of the shape or form of our body and the expectations of bodily comportment assigned by identity: race, gender, sex, age, sexuality. As a postural model, the body image, or corporeal schema, is informed by how the body is positioned to space relative to other people, objects, and the environment. Body image is an implicit notion of the relationship between our body and things. According to Weiss,

the subjective experience of our bodies generates a relational aspect between the form of the body with emotional and affective registers.

For Alcoff and Weate, corporeal schema, however, are racialized, thus creating a disequilibrium of body image, hindered by racism and colonialism or the historico-cultural schema that establishes racial parameters within which the corporeal schema is supposed to fit. The sense we individually have of our own body is an extension of our awareness of others responses to it: of any pattern that emerges in others responses to our material being within our social environments. Social beliefs construct race. Sensory experience and assigned language impact personal values, beliefs, and modes of perception.

Perception is distinct from vision, according to this understanding. Vision is a register of the sensorial. Perception is the juncture of vision with learned knowledge. Semiotic meaning weaves with visibility to the sensoria. In this context, knowledge is sedimented and perception emerges. What we see is always within the context of culture and always contains a tacit knowledge that frames its social meaning.

Alcoff's is a subjectivist approach appreciating the constancy of visible identity in lived experience. The everydayness of lived experience reveals how race and other visible identities are constituted of bodily experience, subjectivity, judgment, and epistemic relationships. This can justify the claim that one's designated race is an integral element of fundamental everyday embodied existence and social interaction. Weate's work of re-articulating Fanon from a critical phenomenological perspective, states "the [racialized] subject enters the arena of interpersonal encounters in the colonial situation with his or her history already constructed and given" (2001). Race is subjectivity for Weate, who argues that subjectivity is a doubled experience for the marginalized subject who also innately carries the sense of what one is to others. According to

Weate, things reveal themselves in the world to be seen. In particular, expressive elements, such as works of art, places, traditions of the world reveal themselves in the world while revealing that they are for the dominant identity.

According to Weate, the body permissions access to very discrete worlds. Within these worlds we exist and are categorized according to history and valued, then assigned each different degrees of visibility. The marginalized subject is aware of that expression, which, as Weate explains, gives the marginalized subject (the raced, the gendered) access to a double reading of the world where the subject is made through an awareness of the self that is excluded from what is considered as dominant or normal.

Alcoff and Weate's argument that visual experience is "real" experience parallels Sobchak's notion that the experience of film is also a lived experience, and therefore a "real" experience. Additionally, Alcoff's concept of perceptual practice complements Sobchack's argument that consciousness is a mediated dynamic process. Alcoff picks up, however, where Sobchack leaves off to theorize the visibility of identity by explaining the impact of historico-cultural schema upon perceptual practice. In other words, the critical phenomenologists explain the processes through which a subject's visible identity impacts the lived experience of social interactions. The marginalized subject both learns one's visible identity assignments (race, gender, sex) simultaneous to learning the social value assigned to those identities. Understanding the significance of visible identities sets the stage to understand the significance of filmic experience as "real" experience, including how the representation of marginalized identities in media and film can impact the perception of self and other, or self as other.

Future Considerations: Critical Media Literacy

Although understanding the subjective impact of film can be a daunting task, there are theoretical strategies for doing so. Critical media literacy methodology challenges students to create non-conventional content with a particular focus on the representation of gender, race, class, and age. Douglas Kellner and Jeffrey Share, two of the foremost scholars on critical media literacy focus, on how urban youth identity is defined by popular commercial media, including identity, self-representation, personal boundaries, and conceptions of "democracy." Kellner and Share define popular media as a system of public pedagogy, where popular media, broadcasting, and its attendant forms, including emergent new media, are the most powerful socializing forces in contemporary US society. As an efficient system of distributing information, these media are controlled by the elite and as such create hegemonic epistemes, a network of "information, ideas, and values" (2009) that recapitulate the values and ideals of hegemony.

The project of critical media literacy, therefore, is to 1) strengthen democracy, to "empower[s] students and citizens to adequately read media messages" (2009) and 2) to emphasize a charge to educational systems with the responsibility of implementing curricular innovations, by cultivating students' skills and competence in creating media, and shift how youth are socialized by popular media. The key component to their strategy is the development of critical thinking skills to help them comprehend how popular media hides the operations of power, creates a false impression of reality, and in particularly effects social conditions for people of color.

Based on this rationale, Kellner and Share contemplate the broad definition of literacy in order to place media literacy within a broader category of educational approaches, recognizing that there are many forms of literacies that stretch the conventional notion of literacy as simply

referring to a competence with traditional print genres. In their conception, literacy means having an effective competency in “learning and using socially constructed forms of communication and representation” (2009). Thus, pedagogical strategies for developing literacies must include training students to investigate the “institutional discourses and practices” (2009) latent in popular media. Contemporary US educational systems largely fail to recognize the importance of students learning “the skills and knowledge to read, interpret, and produce [...] texts and artifacts [and] gain the intellectual tools and capacities to fully participate in one’s culture and society” (2005). Doing so would assist students in understanding the historical and cultural legacies that exist within cultural production, such as mainstream media and social institutions.

The program goals proposed by the critical media literacy body of literature is explicit when arguing that the educators should confront issues of power by focusing on developing critical thinking skills and critical consciousness. It would be an easy step to introject the pedagogical ideologies from critical media literacy into the goals that are common in community-based practice with youth. Considering the issues that are often addressed within those projects (anti-bias/anti-bullying, social justice, educational equity, HIV prevention, violence prevention), such an introjection would indeed seem appropriate. To further define the models of power that can work best to challenge recapitulations of hierarchical power relations in arts pedagogy, first and foremost it is necessary for investigations of power be made explicit in all aspects of arts pedagogy and program design. Such theoretical practice is extensive in the critical pedagogy literature.

Critical media literacy is an expansion of this definition of literacy. As a pedagogy, critical media literacy can enhance the potential of arts based interventions with youth to engage

with the “critical [...] analy[sis] of relationships between media and audiences, information and power” (2009). As a method toward meeting this objective, critical medial literacy necessarily involves building skills to decipher the messages within media content. Kellner and Share are clear that their definition of critical media literacy is part of an overall project of radical democracy where they conceive of the educational system as invested in democratizing all aspects of society. The inclusion of participation in their conception of literacies is a response to the relationship between media and the hegemonic order. As they explain, literacies and technologies are in constant interplay with social and cultural shifts, particularly the interest of the dominant classes.

As a democratizing project, critical media literacy prioritizes the cultivation of skills for reading, interpreting, and producing new media. Kellner and Share posit that this begins with building analytical skills in deciphering “media codes and conventions, [...] criticizing stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and developing] competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts” (2009). Therefore, a comprehensive approach is required to help students learn the methods of distinguishing and measuring the content within popular culture forms and applying critical thinking to the effects and the functions of that media. Finally, their approach stipulates that students must engage in “using media intelligently [...] and construct[ing] alternative media” (2009). This approach, for Kellner and Share, is not just their approach to critical media literacy, but they propose this as a necessary shift in education, arguing that their critical media literacy models a pedagogical prototype for democratizing the US educational system.

Critical Media Literacy, A Practical Approach

There are five *core concepts* in Douglas Kellner's and Jeff Share's approach to critical media literacy: 1) Principle of Non-Transparency; 2) Codes and Conventions; 3) Audience Decoding; 4) Content and Message; 5) Media is created for profit. This framework incorporates multiple fields of adult educational theory, critical theory, and cultural studies with critical media literacy theory to build a comprehensive pedagogy.

First, Kellner and Share's *Principle of Non-Transparency* relies on philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes' approach where he "challenges the naturalness of a message" (2005). From this point of origin, Kellner and Share incorporate media scholar Len Masterman's assertion that media education should reveal that media messages are "created, shaped, and positioned" (2005) through a process. Henry Giroux then is employed for his analysis of the naturalizing effects of historical production. Combining these scholars helps Kellner and Share illuminate how decisions are made in the production and distribution of popular culture forms with regard to content and how these decisions are predicated on a system of inclusion and exclusion.

The next concept, *Codes and Conventions*, focuses on the manner with which media messages engage with a specific creative language system. Still relying on semiotic analysis, Kellner and Share unpack the functions of signs and symbols in media. There are two meanings to signs: the denotative is the literal meaning of media content, while the connotative is the associative meaning assigned subjectively through "ideological and cultural codes" (2005). Popular media operates in such a way as to conflate the distinctions between these two levels of meaning and thereby hides the "historical and social construct[edness]" (2005) of what is represented. In other words, the fact that there is a difference between literal versus associative

meanings is completely lost in this process. This process enables the perpetuation of racism, sexism, and classism. Therefore, there is a need to create a structural analysis of the models of representation naturalize the qualities attached to identity markers within media.

Core concept three is called *Audience Decoding*. It is this piece of Kellner and Share's approach that stipulates that different people experience the same media message differently. Kellner and Share explain that this concept has evolved from work at Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the UK. This notion considers an "active audience" that "challenges previous theories that" conceives audiences "as passive recipients" (2005). This aspect of their approach borrows from Stuart Hall to argue, "that a distinction must be made between the encoding [...] and the decoding" (2005) of media texts. Enlisting this argument, Kellner and Share argue that audiences have the ability "to produce their own meanings and to decode texts in [...] oppositional ways" (2005), in addition to more conventional ways that are consistent with the dominant ideology.

This component of Kellner and Share's approach is influenced by their engagement with audience theory from cultural studies that maintains the meaning of texts is contingent upon the "interdiscursive context in which viewers interpret it" (2005). Engaging with audience theory facilitates the argument that media reception involves an intricate negotiation of reading media within which the audience is neither "powerless nor omnipotent" (2005) to the messages. This also breaks from the traditional understanding of media reception as a simple binary. Kellner and Share explain that employing audience theory is significant because it allows for a nuanced understanding of the moment of reception "as a contested terrain of cultural struggle where critical thinking skills offer potential for the audience to negotiate different readings and openly struggle with dominant discourses" (2005). The significance of this point is it indicates the

capacity of young people to engage with the complexity of popular media and their environment. Using this audience theory opens up possibilities for working with youth to unpack and confront the naturalizing effect of media.

What's more, the differences in meaning correlate to the subject positions occupied by audience members. It is vital that viewers of media are made aware of various "standpoints" (2005), because as they do, their capacity to interpret media content expands perspectives exponentially. For Kellner and Share this capacity for audiences to gain competence in reading and interpreting media from other positions contributes to a robust democracy in that students learn to appreciate diverse "experiences, histories, and cultures constructed within structures of dominance and subordination" (2005) through their capacity to perceive varied positionalities. Although, this is a hopeful position to take, critical media literacy creates a framework to approach developing this skill among media consumers.

The fourth core concept is titled *Content and Message*. In this component Kellner and Share focus on popular media content. They posit that in popular media there is a system of biased and ideological messaging embedded within its representation that contains explicit and implicit connotations. Kellner and Share rely on cultural, feminist, critical theories to strengthen this area of their analysis and to explain that for students it is important that they are able to locate biases in media and "recognize the subjective nature of all communication" (2005).

The final core concept is about *Motivation*. Kellner and Share observe that students seldom think media is more than a tool for entertaining or informing. Here they challenge students to consider the reasons media messages are sent, to whom media messages are sent, and for what purposes media message are sent. They predicate these questions on the market

economy of mass media and the growing trends in the U.S market that has led to the consolidation of ownership, which has diminished the perspective represented by media outlets.

They are clear the media is made for profit and it is important for students of media to be aware of the ramifications this has on the production and distribution media content. What's more, they explain that the consolidation of ownership has invested control of the "public airwaves to a few multinational oligopolies to determine who and what is represented and how" (2005) it is characterized. Kellner and Share assert that the "concentration of ownership threatens the independence and diversity of information and creates the possibility for the global colonization of culture and knowledge" (2005). This speaks to the urgency of Kellner and Share, for implementing critical media approaches that teach the skills important in complicating the reading of media texts, denaturalize the representation of reality within mainstream media, and offer comprehensive strategies for creating alternative media.

Media and Perception

Since my time with STAHR! media has become even more ubiquitous with the proliferation of online platforms. I have invested in learning to understand the mechanisms through which image, film, and popular media have such a profound impact on individual perception.

Exploring visual media using the tools provided in these, theories build the understanding of affective and phenomenological aspects of consuming popular media. In retrospect, the absence of critical media literacy in the program goals and the process with the young women is one significant reason that the program could not reach all of its goals. The naïve design created far too many tiers of the program. Those few tiers demonstrating some success with the first tiers, needed additional time to develop the later phases, but for each tier to be successful it would

have required a degree of pedagogical intensity that would only be possible with a larger, well-trained staff. The analysis of power was notably incomplete without critical media literacy in the design.

STAHR! was one of the most complex and intricate projects that I had worked with at the time. It was an important opportunity for young people to explore new ways of expressing themselves in its design as a multi-tiered film-based program to reduce the risk of HIV infection among adolescent women who were classified as being at risk of contracting HIV through sex. However, through reexamination, I can see that the design and the execution of the program: were hindered by a naïve understanding of media literacy; and a problematic climate of hierarchical power relations.

Based on the engagement with media in the STAHR! project, the focus was on the acute goals of preventing HIV transmission in young, urban women, but lacked an investment in challenging the ideology and the political structures that produced the health crisis in the first place. The analysis of popular media was insufficient as a result. The layering of other acute goals (health promotion, social justice issue, print literacy, empowerment) with media literacy goals that Kellner and Share advocate requires an investment of time that may not prove feasible in all contexts. In future projects, I would like to focus on discussing institutionalized power as it limits social mobility, access to resources, as well as media literacy and representation. This framework can also help students become aware of how broader institutions, such as the media, operate to hide historical biases regarding gender, race, sexuality, class and age.

Historically, community-based arts practice has developed from activist and educational practices with specific goals that lean toward social justice. This practice reflects a consistent concern for individual development, personal empowerment, the catalyzing of social

movements, health education, cultural education, cultural preservation, and community-building. Foundational to the history of these traditions is the constancy of artists crossing lines of access and culture, class and identity. I discussed context, in the last chapter, through an understanding of culture, sociology, and history. I would like to expand upon this understanding of context by pointing to the structural biases that create the marginalization of the populations that are engaged by community-based practices. For this reason, projects that forego a critical exploration of these circumstances can fail to help accomplish their own goals in the long term and fail to help participants 1) understand the complexity of institutional power and 2) inhibit them from developing the critical thinking skills to navigate those power structures. Without intentional, methodical planning, programs will fail to subvert these structures and become susceptible to become complicit to their oppressive effects. It is important to note that the marginalization of specific populations is what qualifies and defines them by community-based artists.

Critical Race scholars, such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, have been hugely responsible for disseminating the notion of intersectionality into several disciplines. These include, law, education, philosophy, and critical studies. The term intersectionality refers to the examination of race, sex, gender, class, nationality, sexual orientation, and still other categories of experience. The model explains that these identities are interconnected, as are the structures that oppress them, such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia so that individuals can exist at an intersection of one of these sites of oppression. Examination of one cannot happen exclusive of the others in developing a nuanced understanding of the

historical forces creating the conditions for oppressed populations and marginalized communities.

Notions of intersectionality, however, are infrequently employed in the literature to understand the complexities of engaged project design and execution. However, such an analysis would reveal the inescapable fact that identity in our historical moment is forged by one's positionality within a society and with it, an implicitly political ideology that frames that experience. Therefore, a project will be heavily impacted by the artists understanding of their positionality in relationship to oppressive structures and in relationship to the social context that of community members. The measurement of success can be impossible unless project designers consider what impact the project will have and, further, what impact the intervention is capable of having upon the social contexts of community members. A nuanced sensitivity of artists to that experience is required.

The history of community-based practice indicates a long activist tradition, thus, moving toward an integration of intersectional theory would seem to be the next best, admittedly painful, turn in this tradition. Soyini Madison's exploration in *Acts of Activism* defines "activism" as a performance operating as a "[...] a harbinger of and a confrontation with the truth" (2012). She explains that an act of activism is a performative action "working in [...] local communities [...] to unveil the [...] effects of neoliberal forces that [impede] and [burden]" that community. Activist performance and, by extension, practice intends "to expose the hidden, clarify the oblique, and articulate the possible. It would be a performance of possibility that [aims] to create and contribute to a discursive space where unjust systems and processes [are] identified and interrogated" (2012).

Praxis, Theory, and Power

To underscore the operations of power in practice, I would like to elaborate on the story about my time with STAHR! The board's conduct toward clientele and staff who were part of the newer populations receiving services at LA Shanti became increasingly troublesome. Morgan was at the helm during some for most of the later moments of this expansion. During this time the board, generally, made little pretense to hide their ignorance about serving communities of color from her. She was held in the confidence of several board members who expressed constant anxiety about the changing identity of the organizational staff and the client-base. She observed first hand that board members were caught unprepared for the changes and felt regretful they had decided to make these changes to their organizational identity. The board, as mentioned earlier, consisted of business people and former activists from the early 1980's era of AIDS activism, from which time they had developed a culture within the organization that reflected its history of offering care and support to adult gay white men.

The shift in agency demographics revealed a calcification of the previous activist culture rendering them inflexible to the changes they initiated. Staff made attempts to resolve the unease by coordinating trainings and human relations workshops. Board members refused to participate, however, despite extensive efforts of the staff to explain the goals of such activities. Initially, they did not interfere with programs and remained respectful of Morgan and Executive Director, Marc Hauptert. The shifting demographic quickly led to a reinvention of the organization's identity. Staff noted that the board expressed a growing resentment as they were overheard making inappropriate comments regarding the ethnic and class identities of the clients and staff. Their resistance became an obstacle to the progress of programs.

The board's behavior, indeed, was antithetical to their prior history of social justice work, but begins to make sense by analyzing the power relations through an intersectional lens. Board members were knowledgeable of what they shared, that of adult white gay men and it was from a position of class and race privilege that defined their perception of those who did not share their same intersectional experience. Their doubts and the indecisions about the future directions of the agency, to offer services to immigrant, working class, people of color and heterosexual women, came about with a naïve understanding of how these marginalized identities are confronted with institutionalized oppression in ways that both, intersect, resonate with, and are distinct from non-heterosexual, white, male experiences. They were neither informed about the historical context of youth work, HIV work among women and communities of color, or the distribution of health resources, or structural racism, particularly in Los Angeles County.

The board's behavior in retrospect serves as a microcosm of the operation of institutional power. Despite their own marginalized experience as gay men, there was a collective resistance among this group to understanding the new populations at LA Shanti (cisgender and transgender women, people of color, immigrants, youth) as equals. Collectively they refused to take action to build relationships with those they found to be unfamiliar even with the general awareness that they found the transition difficult. I would add that this resistance reflects a fear of confronting their own biases in light of their identities as marginalized people. In the moment they were confronted by their own intersectionality, simultaneously oppressed as gay men, privileged, nonetheless, by their race, gender, and economic privilege. Ultimately, the board's lack of self-awareness and critical self-reflection (which I will discuss in more depth in the next chapter)

became a barrier to their support of the program and the respective staff, inhibiting further development and expansion of the organization.

To examine power and the many levels of power I return to two theoretical areas I have already discussed. Critical pedagogy and critical race theories both interrogate structural power specifically addressing education, law, sociology, and history – fields that directly affect conditions in the material world. Articulating community-based arts practice, therefore, with the literature from these areas reinforces several popular imperatives of community-based practice, e.g., social justice, critical thinking skills, communication skills, identity development, community-building, aesthetic criticality, and political agency. Community-based practice widely, but in particular with youth has the potential to provide space for the consideration of agency and identity within a specific social/political/cultural situation. In the interest of developing rigorous goals, engaged artists must train and develop practical skills to discuss issues of positionality, dialogue, intersectionality, critical self-reflection, and the juxtaposition of these to aesthetic traditions.

Within U.S educational systems, the theory of arts instruction is informed by mainstream standards that have become significant influences on community-based practice. Nonetheless, engaged arts-making, is also often informed by political ideologies critical of mainstream politics. In my experience, directing community-based arts-making projects operating in non-profit and grassroots sectors, conventional arts pedagogies are often a standard of influence of arts instruction. For radical and critical pedagogy scholars, the major project of pedagogical activism focuses on the development of the individual. The influences of the cultural formations within a social context and the subjective transformation among individuals with a shared

identity can often define the most long lasting impact of a movement or an action. In the attempt to produce cultural change, the efforts also create individual change.

Paolo Freire's notion of liberatory dialogic education grounds itself in challenging the western banking model. Key to critical pedagogy is the understanding that this paradigm is also obligated to assist people in realizing their positions as culture makers, in contrast to consumers as is the primary objective in the banking model. With a shift to liberatory education and critical pedagogy consciousness is raised parallel to culture making in an effort to create social change. This model is key to designing dialogic educational models to challenge conventional, hegemonic discourses with youth in engaged arts processes.

Further, implementing a standard of community-based practice borrowed from critical pedagogy will help establish a common vocabulary, sensibility, and conceptualization of process, which in turn assists in defining expectations for the various roles and for the micro-dynamics of the overall process. Priorities of training can be extrapolated from within the ideology of critical pedagogy. With Freirean training, there is an emphasis on ethics, preparation, and process. The emphasis underscores the complicated character of Freirean methodology and the difficulty innate to its implementation. The principle conceit is that developing the individual first is the most effective way to build community within an oppressive system, thus, the goal is to increase political agency, individually and among the collectively.

Critical pedagogy as a discipline is the most accomplished in providing a methodology leading to individual political consciousness and agency. Engaged arts-making, when integrated with critical pedagogy, has the capacity to address the development of individual agency. Youth projects can include, as strategies, facilitated discussions built upon critical pedagogical approaches to enhance the full development of critical thinking skills and the negotiation of

institutional power. For the arts-making aspect of the process, it is important to maintain a delicate flexibility in sharing space among all collaborators, while staying aware that the youths' experience in process is the priority. Allowing this flexibility is not only pragmatic for arts-making, but also in assisting youth to build the sense of reciprocity that is at the foundation of creating a safe space in any context. Safe space is a vital element to creating a process that assists youth in cultivating a lasting sense of individual agency and self-empowerment in light of structural oppressions. To that end, program design must include elements that operate to decentralize authority and power explicitly with youth.

When programs neglect to address power in project design, the cultural values and positionality of the art instructors will dominate the program design, collaborative process, and aesthetic sensibility. The danger here is that youth from marginalized populations are confronted by institutional power in their everyday lives, so for artists to not engage with criticality in their collaboration runs the risk of recapitulating dominant ideology and hegemonic power structures. Therefore, when common youth arts program goals intend to confront issues that are believed caused by an abuse of power (i.e., bias and bullying, social and educational inequality, HIV prevention, and domestic violence prevention) and intends to challenge recapitulations of unbalanced power relations it is essential to articulate the project with an understanding of the structural oppressions. Each community-based project will define its relationship to social movements uniquely. The political ideology of every project, therefore, will reflect the political sensibilities of the host organizations and teaching artists. The lesson illustrated within this case study is the compromised when not designed with an awareness of the social context of youth. The power of generating new art in collaboration, therefore, is the opportunity this process can provide to create new knowledge and articulate new meaning about social experience. The

collaborative aspect of this process can offer opportunities to develop new strategies for decentralizing notions of power and creating new epistemologies for challenging the dominant order. Placing these demands on community-based practice will require a deliberate synthesis of these principles. Rigorous training will help establish a common vocabulary, sensibility, and approaches to conceptualizing complicated processes. In turn, common frames will lead to defining expectations of practitioners and the pedagogy of the process. These also help develop vocabularies to explain how structural oppressions manifest within the administrative elements an organization.

Power, Fear, and Failure

Unfortunately, the new diversity LA Shanti developed in the effort to maintain their relevance in a new era of HIV services was too overwhelming for the board's rigid social order. As the various project funds began to dry up, the board of directors struggled to understand the relevance as well as the potential of the project. This board consisted of individuals who had been involved in the organization for decades as volunteers in the adult programs. They struggled to understand the new contingencies of volunteering for the youth programs, including their need to be supervised by staff in all of their interactions with the youth, the legal background checks, and the required trainings on setting appropriate boundaries with youth. The narratives in question now that STAHR! had undergone such drastic transformations were young people of color and white gay male and the shifting culture.

The values, norms, expectations, and practices established earlier had run their course, needing to make way for a new set of values, norms, expectations, and practices consistent with the new services and demographics. Nonetheless, they struggled to understand the new

contingencies of involvement with services, fundraising, and administrative demands. The addition of youth services was a particular challenge because the presence of working class adolescents clashed with the old culture. Staff and volunteers with the growing youth programs now needed to follow legal protocols before working with minors.

The idea of adhering strictly to legal restrictions offended many of the old guard whose politics had been staunchly anti-establishment and anti-authoritarian in the 1980s and 1990s. The issue became symbolic for many, as the board failed to accept the rules were required of all credible agencies working with youth and not a tactic meant to exclude them. Several board members expressed a fear that the demographic populations now served by Shanti would have to compete with each other for respect, compassion, and resources. Outlying voices would occasionally challenge this idea, pointing to the similar impact HIV disease was having on all the populations in questions, but these voices were largely ignored. Eventually, the board's failure to understand the operations of institutional power fueled this mentality and they became directly resistant to supporting several programs, including STAHR!, despite the positive data collected from the weekly evaluations with youth.

In June 2003, several weeks into the young men's phase, the board decided to cut STAHR! They made the decision despite OAPP's expressed interest in renewing the contract for another three-year term. Morgan had informed them of these developments on several occasions during board meetings and included the information in regular written reports. As far as funding for programs, she oversaw, she was concerned the least about STAHR! The board had approached her previously about shutting down certain programs to cut costs. She explained on these occasions, per the contract, that they would then be obligated to pay back the funds OAPP

granted the organization to run the program for the entire contracted period of three and a half years.

When they made this decision without consulting her, she reminded them of this fact. They were indifferent and proceeded with their decision. Then Morgan, as Director of Programs, resigned from her position in protest of their decision. She contacted the OAPP contract monitors to notify them that the board had made this decision without consulting her and she would be resigning. The decision was ridiculously unprecedented and deeply damaged the reputation of the organization's reputation, especially with all the offices of the Los Angeles County Department of Health and Human Services. It would take the Board two months to understand the true fiscal and legal implications of cutting the program. They seemed to underestimate the amount of money the program had been granted and realized that they were not financially solvent enough to return the full amount. OAPP offered them an option, to complete the contract period, while maintaining the goals. They advised LA Shanti to ask me back so the board was forced to ask me to return for the remainder of the contrast period. I agreed to return only as a consultant hoping to properly close program with the youth, who had felt abandoned by the organization.

The fumbling with the STAHR! program proved to be the first in a long line of ill-fated decisions that ultimately led to the closing of LA Shanti. I share this detail as an illustration of the lack of judgment they demonstrated. Their decisions were so ill advised that they undermined their standing with OAPP. New grant applications were rejected; existing contracts were not renewed upon their terms' expiration dates. Previously short-listed for innovative program design, the organization slipped out of favor and lost its foothold in the HIV services arena. In 2005, LA Shanti filed for bankruptcy and shut its doors for the last time. The conflict

within the Shanti organization is an unfortunate example of the role that power can play when identities collide. Admittedly, the LA Shanti board response is an extreme example of individuals abusing power. However, I highlight this situation to illustrate how decisions of those in power reverberate in significant ways upon the lives of those without power. This climate impeded the progress of the program and hindered the number of youth that could have participated in the filmmaking component.

The board's decision to cut the program eviscerated the long-term goals to showcase the film they made together, which I believe was the critical aspect of this project. The youth film was to reflect the experiences of the youth and future discussions of it, we hoped to implement to spark further conversations among additional youth to discuss their own experiences, using the film as a contrast. However, this would never happen because of the board's decision. The board summarily silenced the young people participating after we had spent six months building a team together. By the time the board realized that they made a huge fiscal error, it was too late to mitigate the damage. The remaining staff and I, as a consultant, did our best to re-establish those relationships, and to ensure that the group saw the film at a world premiere, however, the connections had already been severed. We could not get most of them back and the majority of the young women in the film would never see the result of their work together.

I discussed in the preceding chapter the Ghose model of empowerment. The tenets of achieving empowerment within that model is briefly are: "1) the formation of boundaries differentiating movement actors from outsiders, 2) the establishment of consciousness that infuses meaning into group identification, and 3) the negotiation of identity where it is made visible and politicized to the outside world" (Ghose, et al, 2008). The model explains that group identity develops from working together on a goal to address structural change; the group

becomes aware of sharing an identity in working together. This creates a shared sense of social capital that did not previously exist. Further, the Ghose model explains that the sharing of personal stories of lived experience within shared social conditions helps develop a shared meaning in that they contribute to the development of a new critical consciousness about society.

The board's decision undermined the potential of the program design to help complete our goals in building a cohesive team and raising critical consciousness to help them navigate their lives, to make informed choices and act to realize those choices. Shanti illustrates an example of the limits of self-empowerment strategies when the institutional structure is resistant to individual progress the incidents with shanti illustrate the worst of what can occur when an organization fails to understand their relationship to power.

Chapter 3

Will Power To Youth

Will Power To Youth is a participatory youth theater program sponsored by the Shakespeare Center Los Angeles, which seeks to make professional theater accessible to all. The organization was previously known as the Shakespeare Festival of Los Angeles (SFLA) at the time of Will Power's founding. Will Power to Youth, from the moment of its inception, was three things at once: a theater-making project, a job readiness program, and a dialogue process explicitly focused on identity development through exploring human relations issues. The first year the program was able to employ twelve teenagers from the Nickerson Gardens Housing Project to assist in developing a theatrical production with SFLA. The resulting play was a one-hour version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Will Power to Youth is distinct in that the program has generated a community of rigorous and self-reflexive practitioners who shares a vocabulary and pedagogy over the course of its lifespan. This team has undergone extensive experimentation in their attempt to achieve a quality of collaboration that is at the heart of the program. In doing so, they have created a set of terms, structures, strategies, and vocabulary to maintain the project's mission and goals. In this manner, it is unique among the standard field of practice.

My relationship with the organization began in the spring of 2000, when I served briefly as a facilitator. Ten years later, I was invited to join the program as the facilitation director, a position that is an expansion upon the previously discussed *arts facilitator*. In the context of Will Power to Youth, the facilitation director stewards the balancing of dialogic process, community-building, and identity development during the entire artistic collaboration. Understanding the role fully requires familiarity with the evolution of the program itself because the facilitation director's role has evolved with the programmatic needs.

Context of Field: A City On Fire

Will Power To Youth began in the aftermath of the Los Angeles Civil Unrest of 1992, when Pamela Robinson, a board member of the Shakespeare Festival / Los Angeles (SFLA), posed a question to artistic director Ben Donenberg: Could SFLA help rebuild the city? She was struck by the events of April 1992 and was convinced that SFLA could help create a cultural shift in the city (Anthony, interview). The Los Angeles Unrest—the event is also referred to as a Rebellion, Insurrection, Revolt, or Riots, depending upon who is telling the story (Hunt, 1997)—was catalyzed by the acquittal of four Los Angeles Police Department officers, Stacey Koon, Laurence Powell, Timothy Wind, and Theodore Briseno, who were tried for the brutal beating of an African-American driver named Rodney King on March 3, 1991, at 12:30 am (Hunt, 1997; Cannon, 1997).

The beating was caught on videotape by George Holliday, a man who happened to live across the street from the site of the beating. He had prepared his video camera before going to bed, to film a friend who would be running in the Los Angeles Marathon early the next morning (Cannon, 1997). Holliday took the footage, first to the police, who were unwilling to see it, then to CNN's Los Angeles bureau where he failed to get a response. He decided to take the footage to local television station KTLA, which then brought the footage to LAPD Parker Center headquarters for comment. Assistant Chief Robert Vernon, who was left in charge as the highest-ranking officer with Chief Daryl Gates out of town, immediately initiated an internal investigation based on his initial viewing of the footage. That evening at 10:15 pm, less than twenty-four hours after the beating, KTLA broadcast the footage on its local nightly news. The following morning the news went national when CNN picked up the story (Cannon, 1997). The indictment of the four officers marked one of the first times that charges would be brought

against LAPD officers based on video evidence. The graphic nature of the footage caused a political firestorm (Cannon, 1997) and ignited a media-frenzy (Abu-Lughod, 2007).

By the end March 1991, a grand jury indicted the four officers on several counts, including excessive force. The trial, and the fact that the beating was captured on video, raised hopes and expectations among communities of color that decades of legal and social inequities in the city would finally be acknowledged in guilty verdicts (Abu-Lughod, 2007). Racial tensions in Los Angeles had been consistent since the conditions that caused the 1965 Los Angeles Uprising, and were growing as local and national television representations of the tensions sensationalized the conflicts. A convergence of technology, mass communication, and a national awareness of race and class disparities marks the historical moment: twenty-four-hour cable news networks were launched, creating a demand for video news on an all-day-all-night cycle; Los Angeles industries were experiencing an economic recession; video cameras were growing in accessibility and popularity; private citizens were becoming increasingly accustomed to capturing events on camera (Abu-Lughod, 2007).

On April 29th, 1992, African American Leaders, most notably Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley and Reverend Cecil Murray, gathered at first AME Church, while a crowd amassed on the corner of Florence and Normandie, four and a half miles away (Abu-Lughod, 2007). Within an hour of the not guilty verdict, 911 operators were receiving phone calls from scared citizens reporting that corner stores were being looted, shots were being fired in the distance, pedestrians were seen pulling drivers from their vehicles and hurling objects at storefront windows. By that evening, raging fires and looting had begun throughout several areas of the city (Abu-Lughod, 2007). A growingly hostile crowd gathered at the Los Angeles Police Headquarters Parker Center. Telephone circuits were overwhelmed. Police soon stopped responding to emergency

requests for help within the neighborhoods where the violence was most present. Several incidents were reported of firefighters taking gunfire from civilians following the police department's retreat from the area. One firefighter was shot in the face while he and his battalion were en route to a fire at a local business (Cannon, 1997). English, Spanish, and Korean television and radio stations received reports from correspondents and various listeners calling in to say they saw police reappear in suburban neighborhoods, which were a considerable distance from the violence and vandalism (Goldman, film, 2012; Mark Ford, film, 2012).

When the gunfire slowed down and the sun rose on the second day, police were still under orders to not enter the hot zones (Cannon, 1997). Where police forces were seen, looters began to empty local stores as police officers and television cameras watched. Firefighters, despite becoming the target of random gunfire, continued to work on extinguishing several hundred fires that were started in the first two days. Citizens, aware of the previous night's attacks against firefighters, began to jump in and help firefighters who were overwhelmed by the number of fire calls, and were still unsupported by the police (Goldman, 2012). On May 1, 1992, Rodney King held a press conference where he expressed his feelings of guilt and responsibility for the destruction and violence. He asked a question to the viewing public that would grow into popular notoriety, "Can we just get along?" (CNN, 2011). The FBI and the National Guard were called in to assist in the reestablishing of order. On May 2, 1992, three thousand National Guardsmen were deployed onto the streets of Los Angeles and President George H.W. Bush ordered the Justice Department to dispatch one thousand federal riot-trained law enforcement officials to the city. The unrest lasted seventy-two hours. Sixty-three people were killed between April 29 and May 2, 1992, and the financial loss was estimated at four hundred million dollars (Abu-Lughod, 2007).

LA Uprising: The Aftermath

The proliferation of eyewitnesses meant there were numerous accounts of the events from multiple perspectives. A constant presence of television and radio outlets meant that a vast archive of footage and photos was recorded. The spontaneous demonstrations, the fires, the looting, the beatings, the withdrawal of the local police force, the civilians taking to rooftops to protect private property (Kim, 2011), the passersby who risked their own safety to rescue strangers from violent attacks—all these things were seen by thousands on the streets and by millions more through print and television media (Hunt, 1997; Abu-Lughod, 2007).

Predominantly the events of the unrest occurred in the working class communities of color in South L.A., Mid-City, and Hollywood.

A sociological analysis of this historical moment highlights chronic economic conditions, the history of the Los Angeles Police Department's use of excessive force, and, at a federal level, ineffectual responses to the socioeconomic conditions within the inner city (Abu-Lughod, 2007). Time and deeper analysis would show that April 1992 was not specifically a teen-aged rebellion. Nonetheless, a deep undercurrent of anger and frustration with law enforcement's treatment of youth and people of color came to a head in this moment, catalyzed by the violent treatment of Rodney King. This compounded an on-going struggle for dignity among Los Angeles residents that focused on the lack of economic opportunity for young people from less affluent neighborhoods. When the fires died, the looting ended, the National Guard were dismissed, and the property damages tallied, residents of the city were left wondering how to re-build Los Angeles.

At multiple levels of city and state government public officials, such as the mayor, the governor, the police chief, city council members scrambled to demonstrate the kind of leadership

deemed lacking during the unrest, which, according to public opinion, contributed to the devastation (Cannon, 1997). The search for accountability highlighted several factors—police brutality, historical neglect at both the local and federal level of government effecting the South Central Los Angeles area, the inequitable treatment in California of African Americans within the judicial and penal systems, high unemployment rates among youth of color, and failing governmental leadership, most notably by California Governor Pete Wilson, Mayor Tom Bradley, and Police Chief Daryl Gates. Police abuses and corruption were a chronic issue for decades preceding the riots. Police Chief Gates was accused several times by several leaders, including Mayor Bradley, as well as media pundits of being out of touch with working class communities of color. Subsequently, in the immediate aftermath, the Mayor requested Gates' resignation, but the Police Chief refused. A campaign to implement changes to the city charter in order to limit terms of service for the Police Chief had begun some months before the Civil Unrest, titled Proposition Charter Amendment F. After the end of April 1992, Proposition F gained increased support. On June 2, 1992, Los Angeles residents overwhelmingly voted to pass the proposition and effectively removed Police Chief Daryl Gates from his post (Baldassare, 1994).

A Focus on Youth

Many now understood the riots as a convergence of events directly related to the deteriorating conditions of the city in the previous decades. Proposed solutions in the summer of 1992, therefore, focused on rebuilding the local economy. The city of Los Angeles issued a Request For Papers (RFP), specifically soliciting creative concepts in youth employment, reflecting an

understanding of the findings that demonstrated a persistent underemployment rate among young people of color between the ages sixteen to twenty-four in the area.

Robinson, within this context, began to wonder whether her organization could respond to the conditions that had been brought into relief by the riots. At the time, she had been working with a group at Nickerson Gardens in South Central Los Angeles. During a meeting of that group, someone in the room expressed an off-handed interest in collaborating on a program designed to respond to the riots. Robinson then brought that question to Ben Donnenberg, the founding Artistic Director of SFLA, who in turn brought the prospect to Dani Bedau, a theater artist and intern at SFLA who had demonstrated a unique understanding of community-engagement and theater-making. Bedau immediately coordinated a meeting with members from the Nickerson Gardens community to further develop the concept (Bedau, interview).

Bedau, Donnenberg, and Robinson invited individuals from the South Central Community Center at Nickerson Gardens to explore ideas regarding the type of program that would be useful to their community. The response focused overwhelmingly on the need for jobs. When they spoke directly to youth about the usefulness of such a program, the almost unanimous responses were 1) “they wanted teachers who cared about them,” 2) “they wanted teachers who cared about the subject matter,” and 3) “they wanted job opportunities” (Bedau interview). SFLA therefore set out to apply for the unprecedented amount of Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) monies that were now available to Los Angeles non-profits in the wake of the unrest. FEMA money historically had been distributed to provide relief for citizens who were devastated by natural disasters, but with the Civil Unrest, FEMA now expanded its support to initiatives working in the affected areas. This was and continues to be an

unprecedented move for FEMA (Anthony, interview). SFLA submitted the proposal at the end of 1992 and was awarded the grant for the summer of 1993 (Bedau, interview).

Why Shakespeare?

The arguments brought to bear from this analysis beg a consideration regarding the value of utilizing Shakespeare with youth of color. Some of the artists that work with Will Power have a personal investment in bringing “the classics” or Shakespeare to disenfranchised youth. I have been asked several times by friends or colleagues about my own take on the matter. My answer is, I don’t believe working with Shakespeare is a requirement to accomplish this work, nor is it, honestly, what draws me to the program. There are risks to using classical texts that recapitulate Eurocentric definitions of art (which I described in chapter one). Funding a program as complex as Will Power To Youth is incredibly difficult. It has survived for two decades because of the flexibility of the model and, more importantly, because of the unflinching determination of the administrative staff to raise the money every year, either through grants or private donations (such as Dwight Stuart Youth Fund, Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation, the Entertainment Industry Foundation, the Herb Alpert Foundation, the Green Foundation, the Flourish Foundation, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Shakespeare in American Communities, and the National Endowment for the Arts).

Pragmatically, arts programs founded in the classics have an advantage with arts funders because the classics are generally accepted and their value is taken for granted. The scale of the production is more easily fundable because it is Shakespeare and the professional scale of the production is a tangible concrete goal they work together to accomplish. Shakespeare is an established classic and there is a general acknowledgement that his work is important. Programs

that teach Shakespeare, in a limited competitive environment for funding, have an edge. The consistency with which the program has been funded through several streams has provided opportunities for hundreds of youth to stand center stage.

When I first began with Will Power to Youth, I focused on the opportunities that youth were given to make, develop, and design aspects of the production, the human relations process and the identity explorations I would design to support the process. My ambivalence was in reconciling the fact that fine art is usually the only art that youth are taught to value, whereas they often come from neighborhoods and inherit multiple cultures that have aesthetics that are dismissed as of lesser quality. Working with Shakespeare can be seen as a recapitulation of that notion, and quite honestly, depending upon who may be in charge of framing the event, can actively work to underscore that message. However, I have come to understand that there are pragmatic benefits as well as risks to engaging with classical texts when conducting such work with youth.

With that said, there are two vital aspects of the program that far surpass other engaged arts programs. First, although, it uses Shakespearean classical texts—which, admittedly, I hold under the same scrutiny as I hold the notion of fine arts—this program integrates theater-making and dialogic practice in a meaningful way. Despite the fact that youth generally have a perception of Shakespeare as difficult, intimidating, or boring, the program destabilizes these ideas by framing the youths' voices as equals with Shakespeare's voice. The process design generates a new production each year by investigating the script, the story, and the characters through lens of the youths' experience. How realistic and relevant to them the story is, determines how the original script is excavated and how new stories (their stories) are synthesized into a new script.

Second, as the group works to reconstruct a new script, the youth undergo a deeply reflective process. This process engages them deeply by exploring who they understand themselves to be, encourages their ideas and creativity, and asks that they create new relationships with other people in that process. These new relationships, in turn, are supported by adults who do their best to model and support mindful interactions. To support the youths' process, the adults' preparation for the program emphasizes practicing critical self-reflection, radical listening, and risk-taking. This establishes the communication with each other to support each other's learning and helps in holding each other accountable for modeling these skills to the youth. The individual practice of these skills is always in development, thus, failure is normalized and validated as an element of learning. Honoring learning, commitment, and supporting others is the priority. This is the power of the program.

Integrating Traditions

Practical and ideological streams converge in this program and are synthesized in a unique way. This convergence was possible because of the values the founding program director, Dani Bedau, believed in regarding theater making and building community. Bedau was first inspired while attending Brotherhood Sisterhood Camp (BSC) as a teenager in high school during the late 1980s. BSC was a complex residential human relations program for high school students attending schools throughout Los Angeles County. The program invited youth from varying economic backgrounds, social classes, racial backgrounds, and religious backgrounds to attend a sleepover camp for five days. The week's goal was to challenge teenaged youth to reflect critically on institutional oppression, power, privilege, and the influences of these upon their own identities. The program directors, facilitators, and youth leaders in these programs were highly

trained in dialogic facilitation techniques specializing in leading sessions on human relations issues with very diverse groups. This was part of the mission of its parent organization, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, which later changed its name to National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ).

A national organization, NCCJ devoted itself to creating dialogue in communities across lines of difference with regard to religion, gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. Their methodology relied heavily on facilitated dialogue to create communication streams and assist in initiating conversation about institutionalized power and privilege. Bedau, who identifies herself as a white Jewish “girl from the [San Fernando] Valley” (Bedau, interview), was profoundly affected by the experience. She explains “it shaped her understanding of herself in the world and influenced how she would come to define herself as an artist” (Bedau Interview). As an alumna of NCCJ youth programs, Bedau began her artistic training at a college conservatory already shaped by her extensive experience facilitating dialogue around issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and age-ism.

Dialogic Process

NCCJ’s and Will Power’s practice of dialogic principles are based on the Freirean theoretical frameworks for communication. Will power founders and program leaders have developed the standards of Will Power praxis from Paulo Freire’s theory of critical pedagogy. Freirean principles are used to ground the approach to interactions between adults and youth, and are utilized to frame both the discussion- and theater-based components of the program.

Paulo Freire revolutionized education with the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, making the argument that education is, unequivocally, political. Freire explains that of all social

institutions, education has the greatest potential within a system to counter the effect of hegemonic forces ruling over an oppressed people, and challenges educators to develop their own critical consciousness as they help students to develop the same criticality to challenge systemic oppression and dominant ideologies. His work establishes an alternative framework for education that is critical of traditional models, asserting political hegemony and the politics of domination must be addressed. By contrast, the traditional model conceives students as empty vessels requiring teachers to bestow them with knowledge to succeed, which is referred to as the banking system model. He critiques this conventional banking model, as purposive in foreclosing critical thinking skills in service to hegemonic social and political order (Freire, 2000).

In what he calls the “banking” education paradigm, uneducated masses are considered empty vessels in need of knowledge assigned to them by the ruling class. In this same system, a sense of dependency must also be internalized among the ruling class. In turn, it is only the ruling class that can be defined as powerful, intelligent, and capable. These same ruling classes are solely recognized as culture makers, while the lower classes are positioned as exploitable objects and consumers of cultural processes. Freire’s call for critical pedagogy, along with that of his scholarly successors, has resulted in dialogic education models that can support marginalized people’s realization of themselves as culture makers. This contrasts with the appreciation of art or the simple consumption of art fostered through the banking model. Critical education prioritizes raising people’s consciousness to their potential as culture and change makers while participating in critical dialogues about structural inequity, institutional power, encouraged to explore critical thinking, analytic models, and consciousness-building strategies, with the sole purpose of identifying institutional oppression and developing feasible strategies

for resistance. Educating the individual is one phase of dialogue. The second is to interpret the ideology into practice with other people, to be self-reflexive about power dynamics in communication practice and interpersonal relationships.

The use of authority in the classroom is a primary focus of Freire: structures of liberatory education, the distinction between facilitating and teaching, and the rigor of criticality. For the model to work, intellectuals, educators, and facilitators must resist dominant discourses, challenge the use of language that supports dominant discourses in education, and encourage dialogical educational practices. Fundamental to this model are deliberate collaborative relationships, which are built upon the following principles:

First, *problem posing* is a multiple-phased approach to process. It is open-ended and processual. The priority of this principle is critical thinking, and creativity. This is antithetical to the banking concept which focuses more on instilling particular cultural and political values and defines education as an all-sum endeavor. As stated above, the banking model frames students as lacking the knowledge and skills necessary for a meaningful life. Access to the proper knowledge and skills can only be mediated through and taught by elites. Critical pedagogy, however, defines education as a mutual process where the educator's role is to 1) pose problems to students, 2) structure opportunities for students to identify social problems, 3) collaborate in the analysis of those problems, 4) lead the students in the process of creating a plan of action to address the identified problem, 5) implement the plan of action, and finally 6) follow up by leading a deep reflection on the analysis and evaluation of the action plan. The second principle is *mutuality and reciprocity* between teachers and students, participants and facilitators. Where the conventional model discourages creativity and critical thought, the critical model reframes the teacher-student dynamic. Here the teacher must actively recognize

that all human beings are in a constant state of learning and teaching through every aspect of the relationship. Third, dialogic practice is something that Freire explains can best transgress conventional notions of power between teachers and students. Dialogic practice accomplishes the difficult task of opening discussions and offering students the opportunity to engage in the practice of thinking critically about social issues and circumstances. This happens by providing a specific framework of navigating power relations for the teacher, facilitator, student, or participant (Freire, 2007).

Freire's dialogic approach asks that all participate as equals and co-learners to create shared knowledge. The goal of this process is always to develop critical thinking and raise their awareness regarding the root causes of their socioeconomic, political, cultural, and historic positionality. The emphasis is on community and personal empowerment. Pivotal in this is that all people participate in identifying the issues to be addressed, engaging in dialogue to "critically assess social and historical roots of problems" (Freire, 2007) in order to best envision strategies for sustainable individual and community change. The central premise of Freire's work is the purpose of education should be human liberation, so that learners can be subjects and actors in their own lives and in their social situations.

Critical Pedagogy, Dialogue, and Identity

These principles of dialogue, critical self-reflection, mutuality, and reciprocity are fundamental tenets of the Will Power program. I will now look at other pedagogical theories through which we can more fully understand the practice at Will Power. Contemporary educational scholars address race, gender, and class in an explicit manner that can be applied to arts-based community engagement. As a cultural critic and black feminist, bell hooks' education scholarship is built on

an “interplay of anti-colonial, critical, and feminist pedagogies” (hooks, 1994). As hooks explains, engaged pedagogy is critical teaching that recognizes each student is distinctly deserving of responsive teaching where strategies “change, are [re]invented, and re-conceptualized” for each learning “experience” (hooks, 1994). This notion of engaged pedagogy requires educators to be consistently creative with students, transitioning involvement with the student from teacher to mentor. hooks illustrates this point by offering her own experience as an example:

“I journey with students as they progress in their lives beyond our classroom experience. I continue to teach them, even as they become more capable of teaching me. The important lesson that we learn together, the lesson that allows us to move together within and beyond the classroom, is one of mutual engagement” (hooks, 1994).

hooks explains that critical educators need to be prepared for investing in students for the long-term because the results of such work will tend to not be immediate. She asks that educators recognize how progressive and transgressive pedagogies operate outside of the common current of education and therefore demand a “radical openness” from both the educator and the student (hooks, 1994).

hooks’s work also directly addresses the difficulties that can arise for educators attempting to apply progressive pedagogies to practice. By way of supporting educators in applying theory to practice, hooks validates that “embracing new ways of thinking” cannot alone guarantee a rejection of the “old ways of practicing teaching” (hooks, 1994). hooks argues that the work of transgressive educators, to challenge existing hierarchies, can be difficult because that requires a “fierce commitment” and a “will to struggle against” convention (hooks, 1994). In the end, hooks’ work brings attention to all that educators can do to help bring about an empowered awareness of self for those otherwise denied the truth of their significance as a

“subject in history, a member of a marginalized and oppressed group [targeted] by institutionalized racism, sexism, and class elitism” (hooks, 1994).

While hooks describes her work as transgressive progressive pedagogy, Peter McLaren defines his work as radical revolutionary pedagogy. His is part of a greater anti-capitalist project. His views are often critiqued as being unreasonable for their strong Marxist influences (McLaren, 2011), however, his critiques of capitalist empire’s impact on pedagogy propels an educational agenda that privileges critical thinking and socially conscious art-making. His work develops through a dialectic understanding of the world where social contingencies are forced into conflict according to their connections to “labor and capital” (McLaren, 2011). He argues against traditional approaches to student instruction, asserting that anything less than instructors creating learning spaces that are “engaging and vibrant” (McLaren, 2011) undermine students capacity to develop critical thinking skills and therefore fail student’s potential to learn. In addition, the privileging of learning space as necessarily “engaging and vibrant” supports the dialogic notion of mutual exchange between teachers and students; supports pedagogies that assist students to question existing authority and the center of power; help students understand how hegemonic orders manipulate systems of knowledge that naturalize their dominance.

Paolo Freire, meet William Shakespeare

These principles of dialogue, critical self-reflection, mutuality, and reciprocity are fundamental tenets of theater making in the Will Power program. Through the program’s history, leadership has committed to challenging centralized authority in the relationships between students and artists, youth and adults. The daily operations of the program require staff and youth to develop and cultivate a practice of critical self-reflection. This sophisticated system has been cultivated

over several years through trial and error. The leadership staff learned over the course of this that the program team needed to recruit people who were familiar with both theater and facilitation practices before working with Will Power because of the complexity of the program.

Will Power's dialectical system, which is critical to dialogic process, builds its integrity on individual practices of critical self-reflection, with adults of the program taking on the responsibility of modeling such a practice to the youth participants. Key to critical self-reflection in this context has been what Jill Aguilar, another co-founder of Will Power, refers to as *radical listening* (Aguilar, interview). Radical listening is the self-conscious and self-reflexive openness to being transformed—to having an opinion change, to learning new awareness, to letting go of a position that one holds dear—by what someone else expresses. Radical listening is the practice of purposefully listening to what another has to share and maintaining an openness to having one's identity, values, and desires changed, in the process.

Furthermore, Will Power explicitly brings a critical approach to both the theater-making and the identity explorations of process. Facilitation includes designing and then re-designing the discussion based components of the program with these dialectical goals in mind. Additionally, the human relations piece of the program expressly involved exploring structural power, dialogic communication, collaboration, community-building, trust, dependability, critical-thinking, and identity. The goal of establishing of safe space together is introduced to the group through this portion of the process and sets the stage for the terms of relationship building with all members of the group.

In the program's first decade, the WPY human relations goals focused on broad social issues, then shifted incrementally to institutionalized oppression affecting the youth population before expanding to include literacy and finally settling in the later years to frame the exploration

of these in service of identity development. In its first iteration, approximately six facilitators provided by NCCJ worked with the program. They facilitated some group exercises around communication skills and explored human relations issues. They were in program for the first week and addressed issues on a cursory level. The human relations component, in more recent years, has expanded and has also become a springboard for the conceptual research conducted by the artistic teams. As an explanation of what the human relations and critical identity development pieces illustrate, a most unique aspect of the Will Power To Youth program is how the roles of staff, artist mentors, and youth leaders are structured. The relationship of each to the other allows each to oversee a specific component of the process. Staff design the Will Power process of collaboration to reflect this relationship.

The choice of play happens in collaboration between the program and artistic directors. Narrative themes are then chosen in collaboration with the playwriting mentor, program director, facilitation director, and the artistic director. These four positions together comprise the leadership team who collaborates to design each seven-week session. Each person is asked to contribute their insight to design the session of the program they oversee. This requires that each consider the insight their fellow leadership team mentors have regarding the youth's experiences of the process. These assessments focus on youth commitment, participation in discussions, listening skills, relationship-building, engagement with the content of the script, daily work rituals, the process goals, awareness of the community goals, decisions to take risks, the support offered to other youth, and the respect for time management, i.e. arriving on time at the beginning of the day and after breaks.

Dialogue and Theater: The Synthesis of Fields

Bedau happened to be working as an intern assisting in another high school program with SFLA when Robinson's inquiry to Shakespeare Festival Los Angeles came in. Over several years, Bedau transitioned from youth camper to youth leader then to an adult facilitator and, then finally, as co-director. Following high school, Bedau went to an art conservatory for college where she began to experiment with weaving together theater and dialogue processes. While attending California Institute of the Arts, she became an intern at Shakespeare Festival Los Angeles and then joined the staff of NCCJ, where she continued to run Will Power To Youth for ten years. Within this unique collaboration, she had the resources to infuse the process of making art in community with social justice and identity work—the deliberate examination of self understanding; origins; family; personal stories; and the question of difference.

Coincidentally, Ben Donnenberg, the founding artistic director of SFLA, was grappling with developing SFLA into a free public theater for Los Angeles. Donnenberg's model was the New York Shakespeare Festival, which motivated him to develop SFLA as a public theater space to create community through Shakespeare in a manner similar to New York Shakespeare Festival's approach. His exploratory research led him to Pershing Square in downtown L.A. where he began to produce theater in public space, Donnenberg's first step in developing a public theater. In the mid 1980s, downtown Los Angeles had fallen on hard times, much the same way that Hollywood had in the center of the city. There were few outdoor free public cultural attractions so the city welcomed the idea of having a theater company hold residence for several weeks. The relationships Donnenberg had cultivated with people in the city, particularly with the Community Development Office of the Parks and Recreation Department, proved fruitful in securing support and funding for Will Power (Anthony, interview).

At the same time, the city issued a request for proposals specifically expressing an interest in funding creative solutions in youth employment and Bedau began to lead the development of a proposal. Bedau's earlier experiences with NCCJ fueled her commitment to develop Will Power To Youth as a space to experiment with weaving human relations and art-making together through dialogue and theater processes. She consciously sought to bring in collaborators on the initial design of Will Power to Youth who could help develop a comprehensive approach, considering both critical theater-making and critical analysis of the socio-cultural conditions affecting youth of color in Los Angeles.

Diane Maze from the Community Development Department and Jill Aguilar, at the time a graduate student in education, assisted with developing the proposal for Will Power to Youth. Like Bedau, Aguilar and Maze were also experienced facilitators with NCCJ programs and were specialists in their respective fields. They possessed unique understanding and articulation of the ideas behind such an ambitious project. Their contributions stressed decentralizing authority and creating dialogue. Bedau, Maze, and Aguilar met to develop the program proposal and worked together to cross reference the practice of being an artist with the academic set of skills identified as a priority of the request for proposals from the city's Department of Labor (Bedau, interview) to begin to understand how to break down the project design and curriculum.

Questions regarding the goals, development, and expansion of the program were carefully considered with particular attention to the practice of dialogue from the NCCJ tradition and art-making from a Boalian-inspired community-based theater model. Bedau's goal was to explore the synthesis of these practices and the creative tension that would tend to develop while exploring social issues as an inherent element of the creative exploration. The understanding of this direct engagement with social issues, as they affect individual identity development, and

structural inequalities, for Bedau meant openly embracing a tension that often considered antithetical to collaboration in theater-making. She believed that tension could be productive if facilitated appropriately and could lead to an honest investment among collaborators, which would then deepen the quality of the art produced. Together Aguilar, Bedau, and Maze developed a process with great attention to employing the principles of critical pedagogy in order to scaffold the necessary skills to guide participants in developing mutual respect, interpersonal understanding, and stronger social bonds (Bedau, interview). Bedau notes that this developing model would be in direct opposition to models in use among traditional and community-building theater at the time, where hierarchy and avoiding confrontation was fundamental. In these cases, direct communication and decentralizing hierarchized power was counter-intuitive to art-making.

Dialogic Theater: Refining the Process

Bedau, both ran the program and directed the play the first year, overseeing a small staff of NCCJ facilitators who were present a few days a week during the program. By the end of the 1993 cycle, she grew doubtful of the feasibility to replicate the program, however. She was exhausted and the dialogic collaboration with other artists had not gone as smoothly as she had anticipated. However, after some weeks of rest, she was able to reflect on the process with more clarity as her thoughts turned to the anecdotal feedback from the youth and adult collaborators who spoke of how rewarding the experience had been for them. Hence, Bedau moved forward. She chose to include additional staff in more specialized roles. Soon it became apparent that expanding the staff also meant training people, which she had not anticipated. What followed in the subsequent years of the program was a process of experimentation, of trial and error.

In the second year, Bedau hired more staff, but in retrospect, she now understands that she underestimated the degree of training they would need 1) to understand the goals of the program and 2) to understand how they personally could support those goals. The third year of Will Power, Bedau hired six interns who were colleagues of hers from graduate school. Her belief at that time was she could easily train actors with a similar theatrical background as hers to be facilitators. Eventually, some succeeded while others failed miserably. This is when it occurred to Bedau, that what the program needed were people with a grounded understanding of both theater and dialogue facilitation practices before their exposure to Will Power. She began to seek people such people with an invested interest in both areas. With each subsequent year, the program would bring in people based on their capacity to mentor youth and facilitate, then trained them in the Will Power To Youth process (Bedau, interview).

The integration of the elements of Will Power matured with this development. Components exploring identity and community-building were weaved into process with the theater making. Then when money became available to fund a credentialed teacher, it allowed the program to enhance the educational component and offer youth school credit for their participation. Bedau noticed in the early years that the program needed to fully integrate the separated components that were successful—facilitation, writing, acting, and production design. She also needed more staff in the room with specific skills sets to accomplish that task. Up to this point certain production staff, such as the set designer, costume designer, sound designer, choreographer, were brought in for the last two weeks. The potential mentorship that such an artist could offer the youth became obvious as the program became increasingly integrated, so Bedau redesigned the program to include artists from the day one of the program. This prompted the next metamorphosis of the program, artistic teams—a component of the program consisting

of a small workgroup of youth interested in learning about and leading the execution of certain aspects of production for the community ensemble. Artistic teams would have to work together for the duration of the program requiring a mentor to facilitate production and community-building goals throughout process.

Over the years, a number of experienced artists and facilitators would arise from these experiments demonstrating a sense of collaborative practice that was compatible with this process of theater-making. The intensity and candor of the process deepened as these arts facilitators gained more experience. The role of a facilitation director was created to help steward the growing intensity of this work and to help provide a vision for the process. The role would be filled by a succession of people who could design the human relations process and oversee the educational trajectory of the it along side the artistic director's leadership of the play.

From the beginning, Bedau followed a model of design, execution, reflection, that was collaborative and dialogic. It would remain in place for a decade and is still in practice at this writing. The staff became adept at seeking out feedback and gauging the progress of participants during the daily run of process. Through these strategies, the staff worked to understand the effect process had on young people and tried to be youth centered and responsive to their reactions. This seemed to be a fruitful tactic as staff began to notice deeper connections developing with the youth. At year five, the number of youth who had attended the program reached a critical mass. Former youth participants were returning to visit and reconnect with the staff. During which time they would reflect on the significance Will Power To Youth had played in their lives (Robles, personal communication). Often alumni would share that Will Power was the first moment that anyone ever said to them that they were special, the first time they ever felt

an adult listened to them, or that an adult took the time to know them (Robles, personal communication).

Dialogic Theater: Including Youth Voices

The dialogic model in Will Power helps to establish the structures for communication, frames the inviting of a group to build the strategies of dialogue together, helps facilitators and artists understand how to encourage everyone to participate, and guide everyone in communicating effectively while exchanging ideas, taking risks, and upholding the level of respect expressed to everyone in the a group.

At the 10th anniversary, the integration between NCCJ and SFLA inspired a new project, Community Arts Camp (CAC). This was a three week residential human relations and theater-making process for high school students. The significant aspect of this program was how it came to deepen the understanding of youth involvement and the synthesizing of theater-making, dialogue, and process. Week one of CAC invited numerous artists together at a residential camp ground who shared similar values with regard to the role of theater-making in community to lead a process of collaboration with youth leaders who were unfamiliar with this type of work. CAC proposed to write a new play inspired by a work of Shakespeare, i.e., *Othello*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo & Juliet* in one week at a residential camp in the Angeles Crest Forest just outside the city limits of Los Angeles.

The purpose was to create a youth identity development process through the classical themes present in Shakespeare. In the second week, the program moved to the campus of California State University, Los Angeles for rehearsals. At the end of the second week, the youth performed the plays written during the first week. This program became an integral part

of the development of this tradition of community-based work. Within the first week, it became apparent to Bedau and Aguilar, who was collaborating with Bedau to direct CAC, that the process was failing miserably: artistic staff were confused by the process goals, facilitation staff were unfamiliar with the theater-making process. Participants were not cohering to the process. Co-directors sensed that the existing guideline designs for program were not what the group needed. When they reflected on the circumstances they were in, Bedau and Aguilar decided to throw away the guidelines and start from scratch. They opened the conversation with staff on the first evening during a staff meeting and asked for the group's feedback.

The circumstances forced the leadership and the staff to examine the process they had planned and their understanding of the goals. Sharing those understandings and discussing them with each other in order to get to an immediate plan was predicated on their confidence and familiarity with the process. In the discussion, they noticed group members held consistent expectations about the process. Ten years after the beginning of Will Power, Bedau, Aguilar, and Chris Anthony developed a shared vocabulary and recorded the pedagogy that quickly became the hallmark of the program. The terms, structures, timelines, strategies and vocabulary to define elements of this category of collaboration was neither the standard practice in the general field then, nor are they as I write in 2015. The resulting manual compiled the methods and strategies developed throughout the years and predominantly reflected the lessons learned from the rigorous and self-reflective intuiting of a team of artists, educators, facilitators, and program directors.

The circumstances described in the community arts camp sessions forced the leadership and the staff to interrogate their understanding of the goals and process. The adult staff and youth leaders sense of investment in the dialogic process was obvious in the open forum that was

created to share ideas, to radically listen to the concerns of others, and the responsiveness with which the staff created a new immediate plan collectively. They were able to respond to the observations made because of the investment in critical self-reflection and mutuality as fundamental aspects of dialogue. These skills provided the tools to discuss and resolve the confusion about expectations and goals.

Will Power To Youth Model

The following terms are a combination taken from the training manual and additional terms that I deem necessary to the program which reflect fundamental concepts to the Will Power To Youth model: *youth development, dialogue, critical self-reflection, and conscious community.*

Youth Development: The first and primary goal of Will Power is *youth development* or what can also be expressed as identity development. All additional goals that are layered into the program are built upon this foundation. The making of theater happens in service to youth development and is the means through which youth development is approached. Questions are developed and priorities are established based on primary questions: Are youth being heard and seen? Are the adults presenting opportunities that are feasible, yet challenging? Are we as adults actively respecting adolescence as a unique time of human development? Are we establishing healthy boundaries in mentoring youth? Are youth getting exposure to new skills in communicating and engaging with institutional power, are they walking out more self aware and insightful than when they walked in? Assessing this in Will Power To Youth has gone through an evolution, influenced heavily by education and community development specialists. As the theater expert, Bedau's theoretical argument in this context is that the better the art product, the better the

development process. This is predicated on a delicate balance of power, understanding aesthetics, decentralizing notions of authority, and upholding a dialogic process. Ideally, everyone is challenged to do their best as they explore what they are capable of achieving when they are asked to reach outside of their comfort level and conversely everyone is challenged to be the support to others in the same process. I'll return to this discussion of personal power later in the chapter.

Dialogic Process: As I discussed previously, the dialogic model is a model of communication that encourages critical thinking and challenges power imbalances by emphasizing critical self-reflection, mutuality, and reciprocity. Dialogue is the expected method of engagement, exchange, and communication in the Will Power To Youth program, between youth and adults. Dialogue is established both within theater-making components and the human relations process. Facilitation of the dialogic model focuses on 1) guiding youth through the themes of the play, 2) exploring the presence of these themes within their own lives, and 3) questioning the effects these might have on their respective identities. The facilitation director is responsible for stewarding the group toward creating a trusting and accepting environment for all the members to communicate openly. She or he leads participants through explorations of the institutional power; critical-thinking; dialogic communication; collaboration; identity making; community-building; trust and risk-taking. In recent years the program's human relations component has also become a springboard for the conceptual research executed by the artistic teams.

Critical self-reflection: The events depicted during the Community Arts Camp sessions were a necessary exploration that ultimately gave way to the integration of art-making and human

relations process. The conflict between youth leaders and adult staff tested the core values (dialogics and critical self-reflection) the program had been founded upon. The concept of critical self-reflection refers to the dynamic process of sensitizing oneself to personal and institutional operations of power, cultivated through the Freirean principle of mutuality and reciprocity—a model of relating between teachers and students (participants and facilitators) that reframes the teacher-student dynamic. Both teacher and student recognize that the other is in a constant state of learning and teaching throughout each level of their relationship. This requires radical listening which, as I have also described earlier, is the openness to having an opinion changed, to developing new awareness, to letting go of a dearly held position because of what someone else expresses. Critical self-reflection is the practice of reflecting on one’s motivations, investments, and personal exertions of power; and of challenging oneself to investigate how one’s behavior might serve to recapitulate the dominant order.

Pivotal, is that people participate in identifying the issues to be addressed, engage in dialogue processes to “critically assess social and historical roots of problems” in order to best envision strategies for lasting individual and community change. The central premise is education should lead to human liberation where learners can be subjects and actors in their own lives. Generally, critical pedagogy dwells on the responsibilities of teaching artists to develop a practice of critical self-reflection in community engagement. They recommend that such self-awareness be dialectical and informed through an understanding of the limits, obligations, and ethics of critical educational practices in marginalized communities because education is, unequivocally, political – as are all social institutions as sites of hegemonic struggle.

Community: Conscious community is built when several individuals 1) collectively agree to create a community together with specific traits; 2) deliberately engage in a mindful and mutually reciprocal process of communication and interaction to install those traits into their community; and 3) reflect collectively on the continued collective desirability of these traits, on each others practice of them, and collectively decide to revise or adjust according to the needs of the conscious community.

The notion of community in the Will Power program has been inherited from NCCJ. The work of which was founded on a deep understanding of intersectionality and institutional power: NCCJ/LA specialized in developing programs for urban populations and operated with the understanding that urban culture innately consists of individuals, particularly people of color, participate in multiple communities, simultaneously. Effectively, communities, thus, slip into and out of the other. Any one of these communities becomes a conscious community, according to Bedau, when the individuals collectively decide on the manner with which they will define their community.

Will Power to Youth's practice of conscious community is predicated on multiple factors of group identity, the pragmatism of program goals, and an intuitive sense among the staff of its function with regard to those program goals. As well, there are established theoretical principles being deployed in Will Power's practice and utilization of the term community. In order to elaborate properly, I would like to revisit the notion of community I explored in a previous chapter. To review, leading performance scholars theorizing community-based or public art practice focus on other complex aspects of this practice, but they as a rule, do not theorize the concept of *community* itself. Jan Cohen-Cruz among these does approach a definition of community by explaining that community is "a shared primary identity based in place, ethnicity,

class, race, sexual preference, profession, circumstances, or political orientation” (2005). In the course of exploring her notion of community, Cohen-Cruz enlists the ideas of scholars Richard Owen Geer and Arlene Goldfarb.

Geer does not explicitly define what *community* is, but explains that community is both a motivation for and a potential site of “cultural democracy.” Geer elaborates about community by exploring the relationship of it to public art practice by saying “community performance [...] is in service to community as the senses are in service to the body. Community performance signals a breadth of practices, and [...] is synonymous with community change.” Geer adds, “[w]hen a community performs its beliefs and traditions it makes meaning” (Burnham and Durland, 1998). In her work, Arlene Goldfarb explains that community is conducted in the effort to define the context within which community-based art practice happens. She writes “community art practice is based on the belief that cultural meaning, expressions and creativity reside within a community, that the community artist’s task is to assist people in freeing their imaginations and giving form to their creativity” (1993). Cohen-Cruz explains of artists that community-based performance is reliant upon them to guide the creation of original work or material adapted to, and with, people with a primary relationship to the content, not necessarily to the craft.

The concept arising from these considerations define the concept of “community” in very simple terms. Accordingly, “community” is a group of people that share an identity; is a site where cultural democracy is unfulfilled, where artistic mentorship is lacking; and is a group whose meaning is achieved through cultural expressions. This collective definition, however, falls short of explaining the nuances of the people that make up the community members in community-based arts practice. The above considerations leave me with questions: Who are “the

people?” (Geer, 1993), What is the culture of the people? What can the people get out of collaborative art-making? How is such engagement relevant to their experience? What are the experiences of the people? What are the psycho-socio-cultural issues confronted by the people? What is the definition of community used by the people?

Geer, Goldfarb, Cohen-Cruz do not stipulate “who” they mean by using the term *community* with more specificity than to indicate the distinct geographically definable spaces that cultural expressions come from. Although, Cohen-Cruz explains that shared identities serve as the foundation of a community there is little she offers to explain why community might be built upon that feature. At moments, Cohen-Cruz seems rather ambivalent about arriving at a definition of *community*, which could emanate from the lived experience of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Moreover, she categorizes these primary identities with circumstances that should be considered secondary identities, such as profession or political affiliation. She avoids interrogating the significance of race, ethnicity, and class on community-based practice. In so doing, she questions the general use of any terms, which would limit the definition of community and would restrict the potential membership through the concepts of race, ethnicity, or class. On the last point, she goes so far as to question whether it is actually a disservice to reinforce race as a “real” identity when it is not in fact such. Instead, Cohen-Cruz emphasizes that individuals are members of several communities and suggests that practitioners remain “open to membership in a number of communities based on multiple identity markers” (2005). Although, she does not “advocate giving up a meaningful identification” this definition presumes that all particularized communities have the same access to open mobility.

I agree, race is not the equivalent of culture or community; however, it is necessary to consider the impact of race. The racializing process fundamentally influences the experience of

urban youth and communities of color, affecting both their individual and group identities. Cohen-Cruz's reference to "openness" implies that joining a community is always simply a matter of personal choice and investment. Such an argument overlooks the oppressive structures in operation foreclosing personal choice. Nonetheless, individuals can hold multiple identities simultaneously, which complicates the naive notion of community explained above. In theorizing community-building art practice, we must look more deeply, more critically, at the cornerstones creating identity and how these also create "community." Such investigation brings in nuance and meaning to the design of arts interventions, as well as intensifies the impact and meaning of the experience for community participants. The history of community-based practice has shown that the communities commonly engaged are visited based on less than optimal conditions established through socio-cultural-historical events (lack of economic and social mobility, lack of access, lack of resources, lack of security). These communities are simultaneously denied visibility. Cohen-Cruz's encouragement to embrace "multiple communities" is a pleasing ideal, however, it ignores that there is a social hierarchy that has created the social conditions affecting marginalized populations. Encouraging that individuals engage in practice resting on identifications with "multiple communities" undermines the efforts made within marginalized populations to achieve parity with the dominant population and tends to further obscure those who are underrepresented.

We can see how membership to multiple identities is possible and likely when we understand intersectionality as the key social mechanism through which identity is formed. Critical race and post-colonial theories assist in developing an understanding of the labels—marginalized, pathology, high risk, impoverished, disenfranchised, underserved—often assigned to communities as sites of engaged art-making. All these labels are predicated upon an

established order, which define these social groups as deficient. Art interventions would better serve their respective goals, through a direct confrontation of inequity in process design and art product. Admittedly, it would be impossible for the field of art-making practices to exist completely outside of these paradigms, however engaging more directly with intersectionality could assist in developing more nuanced and sophisticated engagements that navigate these complex waters more proficiently.

Justice and/versus Healing: Reprised

In chapter one, I argued that there is a distinction between justice and healing. The field of community-based art-making often frames community sites as “lacking” and “in need.” For various reasons artists assign these descriptors without question. Simultaneously, these labels define the community by their problems and the artists according to the solutions they can offer the communities. Solving or providing temporary relief from community problems commonly becomes the focus of engaged practice. In discussing the advantage of developing a justice framework in lieu of a singularly healing one, I explained that healing frames tend to recapitulate structural oppression by ignoring the institutional issues causing such social conditions. At a fundamental level, however, it is not healing that needs to be supported by community-based practice, but justice. Theorizing community-based art-making needs to challenge “lack” pathologies and complicate “healing” rhetoric because doing so places the responsibility of improving the quality of life on the individual; it frames the problem as an issue that has the possibility of being solved or changed by an individual. In lieu of this hasty analysis, I will explore theoretical strategies to contend with the circumstances, conditions, and systemic issues and understand the complex social structures within marginalized communities.

Critical race theory and post-colonial theory supports the distinction, and challenges the notion that people of color do not succeed because of a “lack” of either the skill or knowledge necessary for social mobility. Critical race theory helps create a critique of existing institutions and subverts the repeatedly overlooked notion that the social situation is a stable and natural frame of reference. Such ideas better prepare the scholar and artist to investigate the use of paradigms that would define engaged communities as “high risk,” “disenfranchised,” or “marginalized.” Community and localized geography are frequently conflated. The tendency to rely upon geographic delineations, as a path to understanding community, is an academic precedent established from within the field of anthropology. However, anthropology’s legacy in defining the influence of space reflects, what Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson define as, the “isomorphism of space, place, and culture” that has resulted in several obstacles to understanding community. It has led first to the notion that communities are “discrete object like phenomenon” (2001), culturally conservative and homogenous. This misconception has served to enable much confusion and ignorance of communities with complex identity relationships between immigration, nationality, class, gender, and sexuality.

This paradigm does not account for the cultural differences experienced in what is commonly defined as “the borderlands” or “hybridized” emerging from dislocation and can lead to a simplistic understanding of how identity is influenced by place. Social change and cultural transformation is situated within interconnected spaces and allows us to bring forth the premise that community space has always been hierarchically interconnected. To understand community, the terms of connection that tie together a multiplicity of differences is vital as is an understanding that the interconnection across difference. Geographic communities are formed and transformed by the interconnectedness of the space they have always shared and are not

discrete bodies, but overlapping and morphing spaces. Anthropology traditionally has been guilty of representing communities of color through severely objectified written and filmic representation. However, new attention to representation practices has led to nuance in the active resistance of objectifying and “other”-ing.

Community occurs in a space that is continuous, connected, complicated, historical, paved by economic and political relations: in a socially and spatially interconnected world and the tendency is to rely on conceptions of “cultures” that assume uniformity and unity. Post-colonial analysis, such as Gupta’s and Ferguson’s, brings the colonial process into relief and the way that social resources within communities of color are invisible to those from the outside, which is how the notion that these communities are homogenous has endured. Generally, communities can be characterized by having wide networks of social relations. This is a better framework to conceptualize cultural difference in a region. Political and economic relations link people, the colonial period blurred from history the presence of wide networks, consequently the image of others is that they are resistant to change and static. To summarize, community occurs within a shared and connected space, which in turn, creates the circumstances that produces difference and relations based on that difference; in this model power is better interrogated as a component within wide networks of social (and power) relations.

Will Power To Youth Conscious Community

Community is both a process and a consequence; a product of process where individual experiences become shared knowledge, where markers of identity individual level (such as race ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, religion, class) resonate and rebound from one another to nuance the broader process. Will Power’s approach to developing

community is obviously very strongly influenced by their engagement with dialogue and decentralizing power. In the work of creating a conscious community, the identification of community and the creation of community are understood as collective endeavors. Community emerges from a weaving of shared socio-political circumstances, shared place, shared time, and shared communication experiences. It is not a conglomeration of homogenous individuals, whether influenced by geography, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, sexuality, disability, etc.

Action is the key piece of Will Power To Youth's community. Their effectiveness as a youth development program stems from these deliberate steps to create the circumstances to define the meaning of a community and to hold each other accountable for bringing that definition to life. The collaborators, youth and adults, novices and veterans, decide upon a collective set of communication guidelines to serve as the frame of their community. When members of the community observe that the practice of those guidelines has slipped or there is a direct violation of group expectations, then it becomes the responsibility of the entire group to come back to that definition - at which time the transgression is named, reasons and solutions are discussed, staff will ask members to decide if the particular guideline in question is important then lead the group in a discussion about the pros and cons of keeping the expectation in place. Finally, facilitators will ask the group to consider how mutual respect, the basic element of a conscious community, can be accomplished when someone violates the growing trust.

In the past, when there have been violations, leadership staff stops program to facilitate a conversation about how best to address the transgression. Facilitators ask the group for their feelings and opinions about a creative decision that was made about the script or a set design, for example, which contradicts an established choice made by the larger group. Then they are asked

to reflect on what they believe this means about the community they are trying to build. Facilitation of these conversations and reflections actively focus the discussion away from shaming and instead attempts to foster honest self-reflection on commitment to the terms of collaboration. This effort is made to normalize complications in building social cohesion among members of a community and to help develop a sense of attachment to the inherent values within the guidelines and expectations. This is the aspect of Will Power process that contrasts most strongly with professional theater models. Although a sense of community will develop in professional theater environments, conscious community-building achieves social bonds because of the thoughtful strategies utilized; it is indeed intentional, not coincidental.

An Empowered Ensemble

Will Power To Youth as a program does not engage directly with the issue of empowerment, but several facets of the project facilitate the development of empowerment among the youth participants. I have discussed earlier the dialogic process and the components of it that strategically challenge centralized authority. There are several aspects of the program that involve the youth receiving training in specialized areas of the theater making. As the project progresses through a seven-week process, adult artists are present to oversee and guide the work, while youth are asked to undertake several aspects with a significant amount of independence. Each year, the alumni are also invited to return in the role of youth leaders. These young people serve as apprentices to the artist mentors and are responsible for developing relationships with the youth community members. They contribute a perspective of the overall group that assists the leadership team in stewarding individual progress and community-building.

As rehearsals and production develop, the youth participants regularly become aware that an audience will soon see their work and youth leaders step into help them work independently while managing multiple tasks, as well as the growing excitement or nervousness. In this phase, youth participants, but more acutely, the youth leaders begin to understand the importance of strong, direct communication. They are challenged to stay committed and reliable sometimes for others who are rude or disrespectful. This presents a challenge to some youth leaders to utilize their communication and facilitation skills under strained circumstances. They are confronted with putting their abstract notion of leadership into practice.

In daily and weekly check-ins with staff, all the youth they are asked to reflect on what they have accomplished and how much they have yet to do. By the close of the program, youth leaders are able to recognize that they grew as leaders, and the youth participants become aware that they have developed into a single ensemble. Much like Project ABLE in chapter one, the collective identity that develops from the need to work together in a project that cultivates their consciousness about a broader issue develops a sense of a collective identity that resonates with the Ghose groups collective identity mobilization and boundaries / consciousness / negotiation model.

To review, collective identity mobilization includes “1) the formation of boundaries differentiating movement actors from outsiders, 2) the establishment of consciousness that infuses meaning into group identification, and 3) the negotiation of identity where it is made visible and politicized to the outside world” (Ghose, et al, 2008). For Will Power, the theater-making satisfies the creation of “boundaries” where they build a sense of cohesion and group identity by working toward a mutual goal: the production. Integrated with the dialogic process and the exploration of identity and human relations, the theater-making aspect of the program

roots this goal in opposing “institutions and societal processes outside the group,” (2008) which Ghose et al explain is essential in this model of empowerment. The ongoing discussions about communication, identity, and community, as well as the production itself creates a shared set of values that reinforces the group’s understanding of themselves as a cohesive group.

Consciousness arises in this empowerment model when participants attach “meaning to their group affiliation and collective action” (Ghose, et al, 2008). In Will Power, consciousness is supported through the daily and weekly reflections that youth undergo with facilitators, and is created through the growing intensity of guided sharing, risk-taking, final rehearsals, and the completion of the production.

Finally, negotiation, in Ghose’s empowerment model refers to the political articulation of newly developed individual and collective identities to outsiders of the in-group. Of the two possibilities in which this can happen, the first, expressive communication is relevant to Will Power. Here, expressive communication, is explicitly the performances that youth present to “receptive outsiders and possible allies through education, performance and mobilization” (Ghose, et al, 2008). Although the Ghose group is not speaking of theatrical performance per se, the context of presenting five shows in four days fits the expressive negotiation of new individual and group identity appropriate to this phase of BCN model. Will Power participants develop connections from this process that reflect this notion of relational social capital, such as “community-level cohesiveness, engagement, and consciousness” (Ghose, et al, 2008).

Just as building material capacity results in a cache of resources for a community, collective identity (CI) leads to the establishment of a symbolic, discursive, and relational reservoir that increases community empowerment. Anchored in the framework of the BCN

model, CI allows us to sift through the analytical complexity of relational social capital and identify the manner in which it is harnessed in order to boost empowerment.

Another concept that is salient to the program is Naila Kabeer's theory. She explains empowerment is "the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability" (2002). Her analysis also emphasizes that individuals be able to understand the "interdependence of individual and structural change" (2002) in exerting choice. Decision-making, therefore, will reflect the individual's capacity to synthesize *resources*, *personal agency*, and a consideration of the *consequences* of their choice. She defines resources "broadly to include not only access, but also future claims, to both material and human social resources;" agency "includes] processes of decision-making, as well as less measurable manifestations of agency such as negotiation, deception and manipulation;" and *consequences* are configured as outcomes reflecting the "well-being" (Kabeer, 2002) of the individual. *Choice*, she adds is "further qualified by referring to the conditions of choice, its content and consequences. These qualifications represent an attempt to incorporate the structural parameters of individual choice" (Kabeer, 2002).

Her definition of empowerment requires a comprehensive understanding of options, decision-making, and the consequences of those choices that are supported by Will Power dialogic process. In the course of the seven-week long, all-day program youth are guided in a manner that affords them numerous opportunities to consider, enact, and reflect upon their decisions regarding personal conduct, interpersonal interactions, participation in dialogue and risk taking, completion of tasks and communication. Furthermore, facilitators hold discussions to explore a personal sense of self, the Will Power community, their school communities, and the broader communities (neighborhoods) they live in. In these explorations, the facilitators help

youth make connections between personal situations and social conditions. The core of these discussions is a scaffolding structure, where each adds to the foundation established for the succeeding discussion and the connections are made explicit. For many, in the later weeks of program, they begin to take ownership of the discussion structure and integrate these in how they consider issues.

Power and Critical Self-Reflection

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter a misunderstanding occurred at Community Arts Camp between adults and youth. I explained how this disagreement related to empowerment. Now, I would like return to the story to explore how this story also demonstrates how faithfully the artist mentors and facilitators have worked to develop a practice of critical self-reflection. While youth leaders were affronted by what they summarized as the artistic staff's prioritizing of artistic over human relations goals, the artistic staff was equally affronted by what they saw as a unilaterally confrontational attitude from the youth leaders. In the urgency of expediting a process that traditionally required weeks longer than they had, both sets of practitioners relied on the fundamentals of their practices to set priorities and define communication styles. The result was a collision in the understanding of authority. This situation reached a plateau within the first days of program and for Bedau and Aguilar, who were at the helm, it contributed to an intense sense of failure. They resolved to discard the existing plans to redesign the CAC session with the staff and youth leaders input.

As the events unfolded at CAC, it brought greater clarity to Bedau and her colleagues regarding what work had yet to be done to successfully integrate arts and dialogue. When CAC was completed that year, Bedau recognized the similar dynamics from their occurrence in the

preceding ten years of Will Power when new artists found it difficult to understand the process. For Bedau, learning how to identify and discern predictors, followed by developing solutions was difficult. She learned that Will Power challenged many of the unspoken values inherent in conventional models of artistic practice. For example, commissioned playwrights and artistic directors are usually granted complete authority. Their relationships are based on the understanding that a playwright gives a script to a company, in turn, the company's job is to—without question—bring that vision to being. On other occasions, it is the artistic director that has a vision for a play, and the company works together to produce that on stage.

In the CAC example, it was the youth facilitators who had objections to the artists' general sense of entitlement to authority. In the following example, however, an artist mentor is confronted by her discomfort with the decentralizing of what she understood to be her authority: In 2002, a new playwriting mentor joined Will Power to work on *Romeo and Juliet*. That year the human relations and the artistic themes examined gender. She had difficulties early on with the degree of collaboration that was expected of her and consistently felt confused. To clear things up, Chris Anthony, an artist who had come on board during CAC and was now serving as project director, had a meeting with her. The issue became obvious during this conversation with when the new playwright blurted out, "I just wanna hear my play."

Bedau and Anthony learned from moments like these two described above that WPY presented a unique challenge to traditional theater. Artists must work in service to the youth by providing the opportunity for the youth participants to collaborate and produce their own play, which is almost the exact opposite of the hierarchical model that theater artists are accustomed to operating within. Will Power deliberately, however, deprioritizes the professional mentors opportunity to fulfill a personal vision. The requirement for artist success in the program is

actually the direct opposite, which is to say that the adult mentor artists are meant to be in service to the collective vision of the youth in process. Here we see principles of critical pedagogy put into practice in this example.

In the moment with this playwright, Will Power leadership learned to articulate this as a fundamental program priority, which they now understood had developed from the original social justice, youth employment, and literacy goals from 1992. The effort to develop this definition set leadership in a new direction to identify and recruit new artists who 1) were open to practicing dialogic facilitation skills and 2) had a vested interest in community-building processes. The rationale was: If artists could comprehend and articulate the advantages and the benefits of stepping outside of a conservatory or a regional theater model with Will Power To Youth then they might be better equipped to facilitate the youth in using their own voices and contribute to the production.

People who attended Community Arts Camp described this series of events as painful. Nonetheless, the lessons learned from this collision of practices led to a monumental shift in the structure and methodology of the program. Direct reflection on the first year of CAC influenced the design of process for both CAC and Will Power in subsequent years. Observations, regarding the design, movement, writing and human relations aspects of process seemed particularly salient. With these insights made clear from the first year of CAC, Bedau decided to restructure the program staffing and served as Program Director. She brought in Michael Rohd, a theater artist with community-based practice and also the author of *Theater for Community Conflict & Dialogue*, to serve as artistic director. One of the key lessons applied to the second year of CAC was the need to have a system of roles in program. Respectively, these distinct roles would have to monitor the community-building process among participants and help

develop a direct response to any arising needs. Therefore, Diane Burby, a human relations facilitator with NCCJ would serve as the first ever facilitation director. All three together co-designed and co-directed the program.

Collectively, these events would become the foundation for the way that staff would now understand the notions of “community” and “authority” utilized in the program. Now that leadership could articulate these ideas, they could better explain how they influenced the design of certain project components, e.g., generating new text, collaborative production design, exploring identity, and discussion of human relations. In the subsequent five years, there would continue to be separate pools of staff for the facilitation and artistic work, however, the program worked to find artists with the two skills sets, or a predisposition for both, who were interested in learning to serve simultaneously as artist mentor and facilitator.

The Community Cultural Wealth of Will Power To Youth

From the lessons learned at Community Arts Camp, a growingly savvy staff began to understand how to improve the existing Will Power structure. The role of facilitation director was integrated into the entire process to address these observations and facilitators were challenged to understand the artistic needs of the process. In recent years, the position has been asked to design discussion exercises to help contribute to the narrative themes. Working closely with the playwright and artistic director, she or he develops components that support several aspects across the creative and dialogic processes.

In 2002, the Los Angeles branch of NCCJ closed its office permanently after struggling in the harsh non-profit climate of the time. This ended the flagship youth program of the organization, Brotherhood-Sisterhood Camp, which had supported the development of

facilitation skills for adults and Will Power artists interested in working with youth. The administration of Will Power moved from NCCJ to SFLA, where Chris Anthony became the Program Manager. The loss of NCCJ was devastating, certainly because Brotherhood Sisterhood Camp had been a major influence on how Bedau and a number of artists who worked with Will Power understood social justice as inherent to their identities as artists. More immediately, however, NCCJ programs provided a year round schedule of opportunities for artists to train and practice facilitating dialogue processes with a diverse set of participants indicative of the general population in Los Angeles County and the broader Southern California area. In the arts rich communities of Los Angeles, there were dozens of artists that developed an extensive background facilitating complex social issues through NCCJ programs (The Human Relations Awareness Workshop, Brotherhood/Sisterhood Camp, Community Arts Camp, Camp Unity, the Latina/o College Leadership Institute, and numerous collaborations with Cornerstone Theater Community Initiative Projects). When NCCJ closed, it dramatically diminished the opportunities for artists to train in dialogue facilitation. Many were inspired to develop both sets of skills for themselves as Will Power programs staff decided to take on training a small number of people to develop an integrated culture where artists developed facilitation skills and fed into staff positions within the program, thereby preserving the facilitation practice and skills sets necessary for the program.

Several factors forged Will Power's approach to theater, synthesizing story-telling and dialogic process. The model of arts pedagogy found in Will Power To Youth exists as it does due to the numerous collaborators, theater artists, youth development specialists, education scholars, community-based theater artists, social workers, and dialogue facilitators have contributed to the program development since 1992. As already mentioned, Bedau, as the

founding program designer and director was heavily influenced by her training and experience with NCCJ's Brotherhood Sisterhood Camp. Marked by a strong interdisciplinarity, these collaborators constructed a model that is built from decentralizing authority and cultivating critical intrapersonal reflectivity to create a project that conceives collaboration and participation as rooted in concepts of critical pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

In closing this dissertation, I speak directly to my fellow community-based artists, the practitioners who undertake this work. In this section, I will review the principles that I have emphasized as a contribution to the project of fortifying the legacy of community-based art-making practice with urban youth. I will summarize the most important points and attempt to elucidate the connections across the list of key principles. Throughout, I argue that these are the things we as a collective need to attend to in order to fulfill the earliest ambitions of community-based art practices in the United States: democratization of cultural production, social democracy, community advocacy, educational opportunity, and personal empowerment.

My hope throughout the development of this dissertation has been 1) to illustrate theory in practice as a dialectical process and 2) to offer my own process of critical self-reflection in practice as a model. Please note that the relationship I propose between theory and practice is born from strategies I inherit from well-established dialectical traditions, guerilla theater, activist theater, dialogic facilitation, client-centered counseling, and risk reduction health education. The only aspect I might venture to claim myself the architect of is the manner with which I have interpreted and transposed these ideas to the specific contexts of youth development, community organizing, and health education. Later in this section, I offer stories from my own practice that I believe demonstrate how these ideas may operate when we invite them to stand on their feet and walk into the room with us as we join urban youth. Ultimately, what I propose is that we, who do this work, have the capacity to build self-reflexive practices in service to the communities with which we collaborate. Such practice is fulfilled when we help youth develop their own levels of critical consciousness as a tool to better navigate their experiences.

What Are We Inviting Into The Room?

Long before I joined the Will Power community of practitioners, they had a saying: “Be careful what you invite into the room.” From my own years of working in community within various settings and with complicated demographics, I feel an instant rapport with that phrase. For me, it means that I need to be conscious of how the topic that I introduce to a group will impact the persons I am asking to do the *discussing* and the *exploring*. In my own experiences, and in the context of Will Power, this has never meant avoiding subjects. It has meant the opposite: to be clear about how we understand the relevance of a topic in designing goals; to be sensitive and specific in our stewarding of the process; and to be responsive to the needs of the group with prepared and specific strategies. Necessarily, this requires that staff prepare for a wide spectrum of responses to the themes and topics we ask youth to focus on.

In the summer of 2013 at Will Power, we asked youth to explore *resilience* as our general theme. That year marked the twentieth anniversary of the program. Chris Anthony, the Program Director—at that point already for ten years—felt it fitting to select a play that explored the idea of surviving multiple hardships. She and that year’s Artistic Director, Peter Howard, chose *Pericles, The Prince of Tyre*, a once immensely popular play within William Shakespeare’s repertoire that had long since fallen into obscurity. The leadership team, consisting of Anthony, Howard, Judeth Oden Choi as playwriting mentor, and myself as facilitation director, started discussing the play two months before the youth convened to brainstorm what the theme of *resilience* would “invite into the room” and how that should influence the program design. We each read the play individually and came to the table together to discuss elements of the script the youth development component could be built upon.

We began our discussion with Anthony providing some context for this particular play and sharing that she saw resilience as a key theme of the script. Then we discussed Shakespeare's plotline to make sure we understood how it unfolds. (I share a brief synopsis here to assist the reader in understanding the subsequent discussion in developing process to run alongside this play and its theme. Note that this play is notorious for being incredibly messy and difficult to follow. I do my best to remain succinct.) *Pericles* is the Prince of Tyre, and the story begins when he reaches marriageable age. He visits Antioch, a neighboring kingdom, to try to win the hand of the King's daughter in a contest designed by the King himself. To win the hand of the Princess, each contestant must solve a riddle. However, the answer to the riddle has been designed by King Antiochus to prevent any man from marrying her. Pericles figures out the answer to the riddle, which is in fact that the King is having sex with his daughter. Pericles, now in possession of this information, becomes a target for the King, abandons his request for the Princess's hand, and flees Antioch. He returns to Tyre, but upon his arrival, one of his councilors advises Pericles to flee when he discovers that Antiochus has sent an assassin to murder him. Pericles flees to Tharsus and saves that land from a famine. Soon after, believing Antioch's need for retribution has subsided, he sets out to return to Tyre, but on his journey back, he is shipwrecked in a storm and washes ashore in Pentapolis. The fishermen that rescue him notice his rusty armor. They let him know that King Simonides is hosting a joust and offering the hand of his daughter as a prize to the winner. He wins and marries Princess Thaisa.

Pericles, while still in Pentapolis, hears that King Antioch is dead and decides to return to Tyre. While on the journey home, their ship hits a great storm. Thaisa, who is several months pregnant, now goes into labor and dies during childbirth. The shipmaster believes that her body on board will bring bad luck, so Pericles agrees to bury her at sea. Her body is placed in a large

chest and dropped into the waters. Pericles, terrified now that his newborn daughter will not survive the rest of the trip in the storm, lands in nearby Tharsus. Meanwhile, Thaisa's body washes ashore in Epheseus, where she is brought back to life by a local healer and priestess of Diana, named Cerimon. Thaisa believes her family is dead so she becomes a priestess of Diana as well. Twelve months later Pericles returns to Tyre to claim his throne, but leaves his infant daughter, Marina, behind to be raised by Cleon and his wife Dyoniza. The play jumps ahead fourteen years at this point and continues when Marina has become a young woman.

Dyoniza now resents the attention Marina receives for her beauty, overshadowing her own. She commands her servant to kill Marina. The servant takes Marina to a beach to complete the task, but they are overrun by pirates who kidnap Marina to sell her and her virginity to a brothel in a nearby land, Myteline. Marina, however, is pious and begins to preach to her prospective customers who are bidding to be her first customer. She persuades each man to leave her alone and never return to the brothel. The owners of the brothel decide to send her to a workhouse, where she can make them money from singing, sewing, and teaching. At this point, Pericles decides to return to Tharsus to see his daughter and is told that she has died. He is overcome with grief and begins to sail, aimlessly. He ends up in nearby Myteline where he is inadvertently reunited with Marina. That night he dreams of the goddess Diana, who tells him to go to her temple in Epheseus. He and Marina go together. When they enter the temple, the family members all recognize each other, are reunited, and they live happily ever after.

Obviously, the play is incredibly convoluted and features a long menu of traumatic events: kidnapping, attempted murder, death from childbirth, the death of a child, the death of a spouse, shipwrecks, incest, and tyrannical authority figures. The play has been highly criticized for its repetitive structure, the shallow exploration of characters, and a convoluted storyline

(Hoeniger, 1963; DelVecchio, 1998). When I first read the script, two points struck me, simultaneously. First, it was obvious to me that the potential of using this play was how visual it was in portraying the story of one person who faces multiple hurdles. I saw how it could provide us an opportunity to look at the idea of hurdles that get in the way of our ambitions. The previous year we had discussed another related theme, “the path to greatness,” and had asked youth to think about the long-term goals they wanted to achieve in their lives. My impression that year was they had a difficult time imagining anything outside of their own worlds. This play might be an opportunity to directly explore the notion of having a personal journey and what it takes to be successful on our individual paths.

Second, I was preoccupied with the extreme sexism and violence affecting the female characters. I knew that some participants would be able to relate to the content of the material, how the story establishes a world that is dangerous, violent, and precarious. But I worried about how much time we would be asking youth to sit with the script. We would be meeting everyday, from nine in the morning until five in the evening for seven weeks. Sitting with the script means living in that story the entire time as we developed new characters, new writing, production design, and performances. I knew that in order to be properly prepared for any case scenario that we would have to proceed as if all the youth did in fact have these experiences—surviving sexual abuse, betrayal, being placed in “foster” care, experiencing general abuses of authority, witnessing violent catastrophic events, having to deal with any number of these situations without the support of a parent or a guardian. I knew that to be in service to the youth, this particular exploration would have to be conducted delicately. I worried about whether the benefits of using this script would outweigh the risks of triggering unresolved issues of abuse

and neglect and exploiting the youth's stories. I worried about our capacity as staff to support the youth through all this.

To be clear, I knew that staff in the program, which included an on-call mental health clinician and a dozen other staff who were seasoned youth workers, could be great resources. I felt immense pressure to build a process to ensure that the time we spent would be worthwhile to youth. I expressed this to my colleagues. Choi had a similar concern and expressed her commitment to guiding the writing of new material with the youth to add elements to the story and the script that would try to address these issues. We proceeded together, agreeing to support each other in the endeavor, and to be sensitive.

We finalized the program design the week before week one, yet our practice taught us that in planning we must also prepare to adapt and be open to shifting directions to meet the goals, if such a need arose. Our collective judgment in assessing the progress of the production and the group would determine that need. The staff, therefore, had to remain mindful and flexible in their ability to adapt. We designed the first three and a half weeks that summer to lead youth through reflections on their personal stories of perseverance. During the second, third, and fourth weeks, the playwriting mentor, Judeth Oden Choi constructed the new script comprised of the youth stories and the original Shakespeare script. Choi did this by leading writing exercises with the youth to assist them to generate and by creating new writing herself based on her observations of the youth discussions. Weeks four and five, the artistic director and acting mentor would work more closely with the group to unpack the script with the youth and help them decipher the meaning of the language, both the Shakespearean English and the modern English. The last three weeks of program focused more heavily on rehearsal for the play.

The program convened every weekday for seven weeks. Each day staff led personal explorations and a script analysis of key moments. We discussed points of the story where the main character is traumatized by catastrophic events and demonstrates resilience, choosing consistently to persevere. I designed the human relations processes across the first eight days to build trust and support among the entire community of staff, participants, and youth leaders to scaffold the later explorations of the theme. Generally, the youth invested in the process, demonstrating their knowledge of the goals, and engaging with the material. As sharing intensified, various youth would express their support for each other by quietly listening and offering their own reflections about what they heard, sometimes sharing an experience of their own that resonated with what they heard others say. Others chose to listen more than share.

In the first seven days, the human relations and performance components provided structured opportunities to learn more about each other: facilitating conversations; trust building activities; movement exercises; and brainstorms with youth using discussion, writing, and theater methods to explore how youth defined their individual identities. The human relations piece asked them to analyze institutionalized power. Then I segued the process and asked youth to reflect upon their interpersonal relationships to illustrate another context for resilience. The human relations angle was the emphasis of the next week. We asked youth to name their own difficult stories—at first, privately, in journals given them by the program, then with others according to their comfort levels.

Then staff asked youth to reflect on how they had gotten through these situations, to identify the skills they had relied upon to both navigate through the situation and to cope with the circumstance. This was incredibly difficult for this group of adolescents to comprehend. When we asked them to think about the problems they had experienced, either with school, friends, or

family, they were detailed, articulate, passionate, and sensitive. However, when we asked how they had coped or how they had been able to “get through” the situation, they went silent. To the staff, it seemed that the youth had become so accustomed to living through difficult situations that they had learned to take for granted the skills required to navigate through hardship. I hesitate to use the term *hardship*, because it is a vague, sometimes romanticized euphemism to explain something complex and painful. Like each cohort of youth before them, many of these young people were dealing with chronic trauma: poverty; emotional, physical, sexual abuse; parents with addiction; deportations; gang violence; hunger; learning disabilities; mental health issues; the murder of loved ones; violent bullying; and punitive school systems.

Throughout these discussions of family, friendship, commitment, loss, betrayal, failures, failed relationships, and violence, they were respectful and thoughtful, adding their own experience to the conversation when we hit a subject that resonated with them, but they would minimize the pain they felt. This was worrisome. As the days developed, I conferred with the special resources coordinator and a mental health clinician, Maria Solano, and the art facilitators, Sarah Leddy (movement mentor), Ivan Robles (sound designer), and Jon Royal (acting mentor). I shared with them that I was struck by how easily many of the youth could speak about the painful experiences in their lives, yet not be able to validate the strength and resilience they demonstrated in getting through these events. To clarify what I am describing, I would like to share some of the youth’s stories. Note that they have requested that I protect their anonymity in sharing their stories, hence the use of pseudonyms throughout this section.

Norma was one of these participants who seemed uncharacteristically quiet. Generally she was incredibly bright, insightful, and extremely supportive of others. She shared her insight about broad topics and vocally supported other people sharing. In discussion circles, she often

pointed out people when the facilitators accidentally missed a person. She made an effort to meet people she did not know coming in to the program. She was thoughtful, quiet, but confident and poised – an articulate public speaker. However, she would shut down when it came to discussing her own life and experiences. I had the impression that she was dealing with significant issues and, as the first two weeks developed, I felt increasingly that she wanted to open up, but was scared of being vulnerable. Lucas was another participant with similar traits. He loved to meet new people and bond over video games and discussing the finer points of the television interpretation of *The Walking Dead* comics and novels. He loved to play and to laugh. He had a tendency to be easily distracted by his friends, a fact that frustrated facilitators during exercises and discussions, but he had a good heart and genuinely cared about people. He loved to learn and laugh, but he shut down when it came to talking about his own experiences.

In general, the staff observed an intelligent, empathetic, and talented group of young people who had been taught to undervalue themselves. We hoped to help make them aware of the intelligence and strength they already possessed, to help them imagine long-term plans for their lives. Even though some youth hesitated to explore their feelings about topics, others were eager to participate in discussions. Generally, they all took ownership of the process, led the direction, and dictated the momentum of the conversations. At the end of week two, on a Friday, we planned to continue on Monday of the third week with a deeper discussion about the connections between institutional power and their individual stories. Saturday of that weekend, however, was July 13, 2013, the day that a Sanford, Florida jury acquitted George Zimmerman in the murder of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin (*New York Times*, July 13, 2013). The staff membership, in its entirety, had been following the trial, frequently picking up the latest news during breaks. Unanimously, as youth advocates and mentors, staff members were outraged and

deeply hurt by the decision exonerating George Zimmerman of murder. As the third week began, the air was laden with heartbreak, hopelessness, and outrage.

The verdict from three thousand miles away compounded a sense of grief and frustration that was latent in the process. Week one, day three, one of the young men in the program had shared with the staff that his cousin had been shot to death at a neighborhood party in South LA. Several other young people from this man's family had had a long relationship with Will Power To Youth and some of the staff knew his cousin. In the subsequent two weeks, no news had developed regarding the arrest of the shooter. In fact, several young people working with us expressed that they did not expect the police to find the suspect because that's "just how things are" (name withheld, personal communication). As the staff gathered to recommence with the program the following Monday, and as the youth joined us, it became apparent that a dozen youth had been following the Zimmerman trial news. Half of that total had attended one of the several demonstrations in Los Angeles that weekend to protest the Zimmerman acquittal. The anger and the pain among those present were palpable.

As the next two days developed, the character of the conversation shifted. I decided to lead the group through an exploration of institutional oppression to help them develop a material definition of this abstract concept. Despite developing slowly, the exercise intensified the discussion. More youth shared more details about their lives: of being placed in foster care; of witnessing gun violence; of having parents who were dealing with alcoholism or addiction; of physical and sexual abuse; of school administrators always believing the worst about them; of being harassed by school security and community police officers. However, as they shared the details of what they had been through, they were still resistant to accepting that they had strengths and skills that had helped them persevere through their own story. I struggled in this

moment with the same feelings that I had initially felt—what was the value of sharing these stories with each other if they could not recognize that they had skills and traits that were valuable? Perhaps, I was overly concerned and the youth would have found great meaning in sharing their stories with each other, but I was not satisfied that this process had served them. At the end of the week, Choi would leave us for a few days to create a script of the material that we had generated together and we would be transition into a space where rehearsals would take up more of our daily time. We would have fewer formal discussions about the topics. I watched the youth move on that afternoon as they worked in artistic teams, began learning memorization techniques, and continued with script analysis. I wondered what else we could do to close the subject on a note that would help them feel empowered by their own resilience. Later that day, I had a thought inspired by the collection of one-to-one conversations I had had during the program with various youth, among them were Frida and Nik.

Frida was a youth leader who had participated in the program for several summers. She was preparing college applications that year, as she would be starting her senior year in high school that fall. We met previously when she participated in Will Power and we had created a great rapport together. In the following summers, that rapport built into a more significant mentorship and friendship. That summer we discussed her criteria for choosing a school and she opened up about the anxiety her family was feeling about her attending college. Her parents did not want her to apply to a school that would require her to move out of their house. She was adamant that she needed to separate herself from them because she wanted the freedom to explore and fulfill the life she wanted.

We are both Chicana and I could relate to her struggle. In our shared culture, family unity is fundamental and the women of the family, specifically, are often held responsible for

keeping the family together. She felt conflicted and incredibly guilty for wanting independence. As the days went on she started to notice her parents having emergencies that required her attention, and we discussed how this felt for her. I grew concerned that they would wear her down, but I did what my training has taught me to do; I asked her questions and gave her space to make her own decisions with unconditional support to learn from those decisions.

Nik was also a youth leader in 2013. That summer he finished his first year attending a local community college. He was in a tense place with his mother. She saw his attending community college as a failure and consistently criticized him by comparing him to his father, whom she deeply resented. This caused him a great deal of pain. She was incredibly critical of him in a manner that seemed to me to be emotionally abusive. One day he came in to the program and had reached his limit. I approached him to ask what was wrong and he broke down. We sat there as he let himself cry. He explained what had been happening and expressed his anger about the circumstances. I tried to support him as best I could, validated his anger, pointed out the strengths of his character and intelligence that I had observed, and explained how talking with Maria might help him figure out how to move forward. He agreed. After we sat together for a little while longer I asked Maria to join us. (By the way, he seemed so impacted by how his mother treated him that Solano and I worried about long-term emotional and mental health. Solano assessed for depression and suicidal ideation. She found neither but searched for other resources to support him. Had he been a minor we would have been able to consult with the Department of Child and Family Protective Services to explore other options for him, but Nik was eighteen.)

Other youth opened up to staff in those first few weeks about significant issues they were facing. Several were feeling great anxiety about their futures: aside from Frida, others were in

the midst of preparing college applications; two were preparing to leave Los Angeles to begin college out of state; one young man was dealing with the recent loss of a parent; several were managing parents who were dealing with addiction, one young woman's mother was dealing with mental illness and deteriorating physical health; and as I mentioned earlier, one of the participants was dealing with the very recent murder of his cousin. These issues were in addition to the poverty that most of them were living in. The vast majority of the youth in the program signed their paychecks over to their parents to help support the family. For some youth, this felt devastating as they struggled to take control of their lives.

Youth can grow comfortable with the staff because there are many opportunities for them to become familiar with us. Some of us run aspects of program with the full community and welcome the opportunity for the youth get to know us that way. Some of us lead small artistic teams or discussion groups and get to know those small groups very well. Youth see us on a daily basis for eight hours. The potential to develop connections is almost inescapable – at the very least, it is optimal, which may account for the intensity with which the youth shared with us in this particular year.

Typically, during the run of the program, as staff develop connections with the youth, they also frequently check in with me to help me develop a general sense of the state of the community, of each youth's progress, and of the state of the group's cohesiveness. There are usually ten adult staff and a range of five to eight youth leaders who are returning alumni, assisting the program. Staff will generally let me, as the facilitation director, know when they develop a concern such as food security, personal safety, learning ability, the physical or emotional well-being, a resistance to the process, on the part of anyone in the community. The goal of this is to help me, as the person stewarding the individual and community development,

to make decisions or develop informed opinions about the needs of the community regarding personal development, group cohesion, intellectual comprehension of the material, and their independence in the process toward the final production.

Effectively, I become the information reserve for most of the youth's stories, including those that I may not be able to connect with directly for various reasons. In my experience with the program, I had not witnessed that level of opening up or that consistency of experience with such traumatic events. As the staff slowly became aware of the intensity of the summer, we were reminded of the old Will Power saying, "be careful what you invite into the room." We felt a definite responsibility for taking care of the participants as they, one after another began to open up.

All That You Are Is All That You Need

Clashing with parents is a common theme in the stories of the youth in the program. The program tends to offer a unique space for youth to become aware of this. Through the tasks presented to them (literary analysis, literacy building, conceptual design, discussion, writing, stage skills, team work, movement, sound design, songwriting, constructing sets, time management, active listening, risk-taking, reflection, public speaking), Will Power offers a moment for the youth to meaningfully reflect on who they are, who they would like to become, and the power that they have to define their own paths. For many, their parents and families are strong, healthy, supportive influences in this process. For others, this is not the case. Many among them, in facing the transition from high school to adulthood, have been confronted by a burgeoning insight that many of their values clash with their parents' values.

Several reasons contribute to this: conditions of poverty exacerbate existing physical, psychological, and emotional issues, while creating yet other issues; poverty breeds maladaptive beliefs and attitudes that inhibit the valuing of ambition; traditional patriarchal beliefs persist among many parents that serve to restrict the social and economic mobility of young women, while placing undue pressures on young men to prove their masculinity, both at the expense of the young person's personal development. We succeeded in helping youth recognize that certain personal issues become common because of structural oppression and the marginalization within certain communities. They understood the connection between social conditions and the issues they faced in their homes. However, some among them were left feeling doomed and hopeless from the compounded effect of discussing their personal lives and the Zimmerman verdict.

I consulted with Maria Solano, the Special Services and Resources Coordinator and a licensed clinical social worker. She and I agreed it was vital for the youth's emotional well-being and for the development of their emotional literacy that they learn to recognize and validate their own resilience, their strengths and skills in navigating their lives (i.e., an ability to ask for support, establish strong boundaries, take care of themselves, stand up against an opposing force, recognize their sense of values and prioritize those). Solano and I assessed what was needed: we needed to normalize the situations they had been through, to confront the sense of isolation they felt from not knowing anyone else to have gone through such circumstances, to validate the feelings these events caused, to explain how "keeping it all in" could become self-destructive later in life. That afternoon, after I led the exercise about institutional oppression, two days after the Zimmerman verdict, Frida and I talked. Our conversation gave me an idea. I proposed to Solano, an adult staff panel comprised of adults whom could speak to their experiences and role model how to recognize feelings and talk about them. Solano and I thought

it would be effective for youth to witness concrete examples of adults they related to, speaking about surviving traumatic experiences.

The idea provided an opportunity to see adults frame their own stories; to share the skills they had relied on; to recognize their own strength in the process; to understand how they could feel powerful from working through their “difficult stories.” It would also allow many youth to see the commonality of specific traumatic experiences and open a conversation to discuss how these events might influence their perceptions, ambitions, and lives. Solano and I spoke extensively to design the component, discussed at length how to prepare the staff, and debriefed following its completion.

We convened before the panel, so that Solano could present a model to the group demonstrating the effects of repressing emotions. She explained the negative behavioral and emotional risks of sublimating pain and anger to provide a context for the stories they were about to hear from the staff. When she was done, a small number of staff, including myself, shared their respective stories of resilience, offering the youth examples of adults who had survived difficult times as teenagers: losing someone to gun violence; sexual abuse; parental negligence; foster care; becoming a parent unexpectedly; having a parent with mental illness, or an addiction; or having a parent who has been forcibly taken away and imprisoned or deported. The youth listened, respectfully, and asked thoughtful empathetic questions to the panel during a brief question and answer session. Following this, we left some time for youth to discuss the exercise in small groups. Lucas was part of my small group. During the debrief discussion following, he revealed that he had survived significant parental neglect earlier in his life. The relationship with his parents had improved slightly, but he was older and better able to take care of himself. As the conversation went on Norma asked to take a break, she was obviously tense, but otherwise

seemed fine. She excused herself, but when I tried to check in with her later, she did not want to talk.

We transitioned to writing and then went to lunch. They were eager in the afternoon to get to rehearsal and production teams. Immediately following, Frida, who I had known for several years, approached me to say that the story I shared reminded her of her own. We had a long conversation as she opened up about her experience. She had never really talked to anyone else about it and as we spoke, she made connections to how aggressively her family was trying to sabotage her leaving for college. Things seemed to make sense in a new way to her. She felt more conviction than ever that she needed to leave home.

As stated, the specific staff panelists, including myself, volunteered because they knew their story of resilience resonated with stories youth had shared with them. Coincidentally, these staff members also spent the most time with the youth and had forged the closest bonds. They happened to be some of the staff members who were the most “easy to approach” (Lopez, interview; Hernandez, interview; Gomez, interview). Informally, youth approached with questions or to express their respect for what the staff had shared with them. I was particularly worried about Norma because she seemed to avoid eye contact with me when I approached her. My sense was she had something to talk about, but wasn’t ready yet. I wondered how best I could help her process what she was feeling. I had another idea. The youth were obviously exhausted by discussing these issues, but I felt it important to offer them some concrete way to expressly define and process the trait or characteristic that made them resilient, to answer what is it that got you through to help them move them from feeling doomed about their circumstances. It occurred to me that we could build an altar to our own resilience for the lobby display. I told

the youth what the plan was and asked everyone to bring in at least one item that represented what had helped her or him get through a difficult time.

Building the altar proved to be incredibly effective, stirring up on-going informal conversations about the items that people brought in. Others would notice an item and become curious. The altar became a way for some of the youth to figuratively share their stories without having to speak about them. In talking with each other, they could focus on what the item represented to them, the thing it told them about themselves, instead of detailing the painful event they experienced. Three or four youth seemed to resist the idea, they made excuses to not bring items in, but as the days passed, the altar grew in scale and the conversations took on a life of their own. Everyone ultimately contributed an item with great consideration. The altar to resilience eventually included an immense number of popular culture references such as superhero posters, comic books, DVD covers, video game cartridges, movie ticket stubs, action figures, collector series issues figurines, over a dozen books, as well as stuffed animals, a rock, a drum key, a baseball, a football, certificates of completion, rings, pendants, sketches of friends, several rosaries, a white crucifix, a phone case, a miniature whale figure, a blue hospital bracelet, a purple cap, percussion sticks, a manila file folder filled with original poetry, a pair of eyeglasses, commemorative t-shirts, a varsity football certificate, an LA Clippers lanyard, a basketball trophy, a roll of parchment paper, a school band yearbook photo, a roller skate, paint brushes, cartoon clippings, spray paint cans, journals, boxing gloves, a bowtie, ear buds, Lego pieces, and pictures of family.

I catalogued each item. This meant I could follow up with each person every day until they brought in a piece to contribute, which also offered me the opportunity to speak to each person one-to-one. I had hoped to create the circumstance to assess where each young person

was in their processing of resilience. Norma still resisted speaking with me, at one point asking me directly, “we’re not talking about difficult stories anymore, are we?” I used the altar as a buffer to assess her state and to help her process her unspoken feelings. Initially, she did not want to participate. I persisted, then she expressed that she could not think of something. I asked for her ideas and she expressed them. I validated them, asked what the prospective items meant to her. She lit up. She eventually contributed three items to the altar.

Choi, with regard to the writing, led the youth through several writing exercises in the days following the mentors’ panel. She assigned prompts asking them to write about their own resilience, what it meant to them to have survived, to think about the people that supported them, how the relationships might be stronger. She asked them to consider what having a loyal ally looked like, what it did or would have meant to them to have one, and she asked what it meant about each of them that they had persevered. Youth spoke more specifically, with greater detail and nuance to help generate the new material for the production. They were able to understand the theme with more comprehensiveness and articulate what the terms meant with greater sophistication. A line eventually emerged from the writing that became the tagline for the play: *All that you need is all that you are.*

We transitioned from the human relations component to the rehearsal component, where the youth would continue to process the themes conceptually. They began to see how all the pieces of process and production integrated together. Two years later, I continue to hear how powerful the experience was for the youth. Several among them, Natasha, Janet, Brian, Armando, Kirby, Yanet, Raheem, Mary, Jasmine and several others returned the following year because the experience had meant so much to them.

We approached the end of program with two daytime performances, and began to schedule closure meetings for the several smaller groups that youth met within, artistic teams, and small discussion groups. Several youth began to express at this point to staff individually that the panel had helped them open up about their personal experiences and helped them understand how to reframe their survival of their experience as an act of perseverance. On the next day at our “community closure” meeting, before the second to last evening performance, the majority of the youth expressed that they were able to see now how they had endured their experiences, that they could recognize their personal strength and intelligence, and expressed awe in themselves that they could develop this new realization about themselves.

The last day, after the final performance, we struck down the set together and cleared the stage. Then Chris Anthony and Marina Oliva, the Program Manager, passed out the youth’s certificates of completion, Will Power t-shirts, last paychecks, and *Congratulation* cards from the staff. The youth and staff expressed their teary thank-you’s, hugged goodbye, and then met me in the lobby so I could return their altarpieces. When we were done, family, friends, and staff lingered in the lobby, coordinating rides home. I was striking the altar foundation (a piled system of wood platforms, boxes, fabrics, and plastic supports) when Norma approached me crying. She asked if she could hug me and expressed she would miss me. She pulled away from the hug and struggled through her tears to say, “I just wanted to make sure to tell you that it really meant a lot to me when you shared your story. I think you were really brave to do that...it meant a lot to me that you did that...’cause I really relate to you and what you went through...I really relate...Thank you.” Then she walked away.

For the sake of my own privacy and Norma’s anonymity, I am choosing to not share the specifics of the story I shared on that day in this document. I will offer that the traumatic events

of my childhood and adolescence I experienced in complete isolation. I did not know that once I talked about them with trustworthy people that I would feel empowered by it. The youth had very specific and narrow impressions of us, the adults. They saw experienced professionals and assumed that we had led perfect, peaceful lives, and made assumptions that they could never be successful the way we were. In some ways, they mythologized us. The reason I and the other adults on that panel shared our stories was to rewrite that mythology by showing them another side of us. We also wanted to demonstrate to them that they were not doomed to fail because their lives had not been perfect. We hoped to point out the resilience in our stories so they could see better the resilience in their own.

Radical Maneuvers

Will Power is a unique program with a generous set of resources, but the depth of experience that often occurs in the program is possible within other contexts too. Throughout this dissertation, I posit eight key principles or *radical maneuvers*, to help community-based artists understand how to cultivate critical consciousness and empowerment. These are *context and framing*; *art value*; *media and power*; *institutional power*; *dialogic process*; *conscious community*; *empowerment*; and *critical consciousness*. These principles outline the dynamics of pedagogy and process that best allow artists to support urban youth and, more broadly, communities of color, leading to their own learning, consciousness building, identity-making, and community-building. I have indicated the presence of two or three principles per case study in the preceding chapters for the sake of brevity and clarity, but I could have discussed each of these principles at length within the context of each case study. In this section, I will review each of the radical maneuvers, as I am calling them, to underscore the possibility of each supporting the project of assisting youth in

developing critical consciousness, and to elaborate on the demands these maneuvers create on practitioners.

Context and Framing: The notion of context and framing that I posit supports community-based artists and mentors in the development of a comprehensive, critical, research-based approach.

Context is the combined cultural, sociological, and historical factors that have created the social conditions of a community. In community-based contexts, *framing* is the manner with which an art collaboration will reflect a nuanced sensitivity to those factors and an understanding of a community's set of values. As community-based artists become knowledgeable about institutionalized power and structural inequality, the potential to translate this knowledge into process and product is amplified. Community-based practitioners' understanding of the impact that structural oppression exerts upon marginalized communities can help counter the tendency of the field to totalize youth as victims in need of rescue. Context and framing, as an essential element of practice, will help community-based artists understand the complications, the landscape of resources, and social systems within an engaged community. Community-based practitioners working with health, education, justice, and personal development goals, particularly, may find this argument salient to their work.

First, a caution: When framing the design of goals and the language used to describe these goals (to teach, to transform, learn, change, improve, shift), avoid the use of *lack* pathologies or normative *deficit-thinking*. Such rhetoric centers the practitioner as a savior and recapitulates structural oppression by ignoring that the social, cultural, intrapersonal issue is an institutional issue and not one that can be cured by a single individual or a single community. Healing, as an element of working toward justice, is more productive, which is why it can be a

good idea for community-based artists to partner with service fields that have fully developed structural approaches to healing. Collaborations with these fields (e.g., social psychology, art therapy, drama therapy, health promotion) can address both structural and individual needs simultaneously. Community-based artists can also incorporate psychological and support services as part of their team and understand how they influence personal development.

The key point here is that it is not healing that needs to be supported by community-based practice, but justice. What we need to be mindful of is that, fundamentally, a healing discourse distracts from a justice framework. Many branches of these fields already confront the structural elements of the difficulties faced by individuals. The common question of “how can we help *heal*?” is the rhetorical equivalent of “how can we help young people feel more comfortable in being marginalized so that it goes more smoothly for them?” Both of these conveniently ignore the issue of structural power and give permission to community-based artists to evade direct confrontations with the operations of marginalization. Rhetoric that pathologizes and introduces deficit-thinking places the onus of change on communities of color, privileging solutions that rely upon communities on the margins to learn the knowledge and skills valuable to the dominant order in order to improve their circumstances. This ideology naturalizes the value and quality of school systems and assumes that institutions are effective and equitable. This maneuver also calls for a shift in framing that moves it away from deficit-thinking toward validating a broader concept of cultural resources and capital that exist in marginalized communities.

Community-based artists must acknowledge when they walk into a community that it 1) already has a living culture, a repertoire of aesthetics, on-going relationships, accomplished local artists, a legacy of creativity; and 2) is usually well-versed with authority figures exerting their

respective power (the police, teachers, and local governments). Community-based art must continue to utilize a code of ethics and implement a critical research-based approach to develop customized, sensitive, meaningful, engaged practices with community. This method is necessary to understand the complexities of a community, including how to design process and pedagogy to best serve that community.

Artists must practice a critical pedagogy of engagement and collaboration to accomplish the goals of process. Enhanced training and development of the artistic practice is key to support this idea. This will also elevate the aesthetics of art produced in community. Attention to these skills in preparation and training needs to be thorough and rigorous in order to engage with the nuanced complexity of democratizing art-making. This challenge is for artists to create a standard of educating themselves about the community with which they are engaged. This includes raising questions regarding the act of crossing lines of difference; expecting conflict; expecting to be implicated; and expecting to have to hold oneself accountable to that implication. Engaging community means entering into a relationship with a specific cultural, sociological, and history context. The relevance of the work for community members depends upon a process built by artists. Unless artists critically design process to engage with that history, the meaning of process and art making will never serve the community member or participants to its fullest.

Art Value: Community-based art-making requires a rejection of modernist values that commonly frame fine art, such as individualism, freedom, and self-expression. Fine art values prioritize individual genius and support the notion that art can be ahistorical or apolitical. However, art theories generated from within working class and communities of color privilege dialectical approaches – an on-going call and response between artist and community. Art in this context

will respond to social conditions, comment upon them, exalt the underdog, and celebrate community resilience. Urban youth are often familiar with art forms that cohere to these dialectical notions. Community-based artists need to be aware that there are two risks to using the conventional values of art: The first risk is silencing stories and perspectives that may be served better through a dialectical design; second, the risk is to misapprehend artistic skills that emerge from informal dialectical training. Shifting to understand “urban” or “street” art requires a thorough acceptance that lived experience is a point of artistic merit and requires a deep consideration of the contextual relevance and social responsibility expressed. Necessarily, this shift will challenge notions of fine art that prioritize cultural hierarchy and elite spaces. However, the explicit challenging of universalist themes in fine art can produce a vital recalibration that expands the understanding of art-making—to value the dialectical aspect of it; the manner with which it reflects everyday lived experience; the appreciation of the underdog it expresses; the historicity of it; and the ordinariness of it.

Meaningful community-based art demonstrates an investment in analyzing positionality. Marginalized communities live within a socially oppressive structure, meaning that they share the experience of being marginalized with a larger community. Generally, aesthetics created within working class, youth-dominated communities of color will resonate dialectically with that broader community. If the work reflects modernist themes of independence, freedom, and self-expression, it will occur because the artist wishes to problematize the influence of these upon a community with which they share an identity.

Community-based art can affirm the traits of communities by echoing these values, while resisting images and values, which exclude or stereotype marginalized identities. The dialectic relationship between art and working class communities of color will reflect everyday culture, a

critical worldview, socio-economic struggle, gender roles, bi-culturality, resilience, family, and it tends to operate in resistance to dominant hegemonic discourse and aesthetics. Art with Chicana/o or hip hop aesthetics, for example, will take authority over established symbols, weaving together new symbols, opinions, alternatives histories, and commentaries that reflect the marginalized Chicana/o community. Artists can help communities to access and exert influence over the power that the dominant class holds in semiotic systems.

Furthermore, in expanding the notion of art value, the process of establishing relationships between community members and artists should be understood as part of the aesthetic construction of the artwork. Proper generating, constructing, analyzing, and understanding artwork integrates the historical, economic, political, and cultural particularities of lived experience (including sensitivities to working class, bicultural, gendered, multilingual, immigrant, race, and sexuality issues). Cultivating this understanding in the art product assists in the development of a similar sensitivity to these issues in process, both in how these play a role in the relationships between artists and community members and in how these might be nurtured within the content of the art work. The difficulty of integrating this notion into one's practice will depend upon the experience and skillset of the artist, but regardless, it is difficult to operate without this understanding of the quality of the art. Within the context of collaborative work with youth, it is important to highlight this aspect when considering the importance of redefining semiotic systems. The common process of redefinition in which they independently engage requires sensitivity to the self-determination they articulate which can be an immense challenge for those unfamiliar with this cultural process. The commonly accepted priorities of community-based art-making are to highlight, demonstrate, reflect, showcase, and give youth a voice in the process and in the art product. This understanding, indeed, underscores the importance of

challenging notions of power within the process. Art facilitators can imbue their practice with this notion as a priority.

Media and Power: Popular media has an overwhelming impact upon adolescence and youth perspectives in the United States, including youth perceptions of self, community, and national positionality. In general, popular media is the single most important source influencing general notions of *art*, *artist*, and the *value of art*. Popular media is the most common source material when youth contribute ideas and opinions in collaborative contexts. Community-based artists can best address this reality through thoughtful facilitation exploring popular media with youth. Unpacking the messages within media is fundamental to assisting youth to explore art-making, notions of identity, and their comprehension of the world.

The perception of the world and youth roles within it is meticulously cultivated for urban, working class, and youth of color in particular. Mainstream marketing targets adolescent markets where youth of color, specifically, are targeted so aggressively that consumerism is naturalized. The absence of complicated representation has resulted in a historical pattern of representing race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, and class identities in media that implicitly recapitulates Eurocentric patriarchal values.

Media tropes portray youth of color as criminal, violent, tragic, pitiable, clownish, over-sexed, ignorant, or ineducable, while white youth are constructed in a manner that contrasts these characteristics and predicates white identity as the opposite of *Other*: intelligent, complicated, sympathetic, redeemable. Urban, poor, working class youth's participation in mass media culture is limited to consumption, where they unwittingly become complicit in the commodification of urban identity and aesthetics through their practical and commercial

consumption of it. At the time of this writing, there are several debates raging about this issue. Since June 2013, there have been twelve high profile cases of young black young and adult men killed by police. In response to these events and to the failure of the legal system to indict the officers, citizens have been demonstrating in the streets. Biased media representation of race has become a national issue, as media outlets are beginning to refer to these critiques. The frequency of these images and tropes has ideological and interpersonal ramifications for youth, naturalizing the stereotypes and foreclosing sophisticated understandings of lived experience. This can bolster dominant ideology, supports structural oppressions, and gives permission to general biased attitudes against marginalized identities.

This is why I argue for critical media literacy training for all community-based artists. Critical media literacy is a specific methodology that can enhance the potential of arts-based interventions with youth. As a democratizing project, critical media literacy prioritizes the cultivation of skills for engaging new media, building analytical skills to: decipher the codes, tools, mechanisms of media; expand vocabulary to critique stereotypes; and identify dominant values and pedagogy for teaching youth how to decode the layered meanings of texts created by numerous media technologies. Therefore, a comprehensive approach is required to help students learn the methods of distinguishing and measuring the content within popular culture forms and applying critical thinking to the effects and the functions of that media.

Institutional Power: Community-based art practice in the United States has developed from activist and educational practices with specific goals, leaning toward social justice. This practice reflects a consistent concern for individual development, personal empowerment, the catalyzing of social movements, health education, cultural education, cultural preservation, and community-

building. Foundational to the history of these traditions is the constancy of artists crossing lines of access and culture, class and identity. Previously, I discussed context and framing. I would like to add to the consideration of those concepts by highlighting that historical legacies have created an imbalance power within social institutions. Structural biases create the marginalization of populations engaged by community-based practices.

Therefore, artists that engage in a critical exploration of these circumstances can strengthen goals and serve participants by 1) building an understanding of the complexity of institutional power and 2) developing the critical thinking skills to navigate those power structures. With proper planning, programs can subvert these structures and become allies to communities working against oppressive structures. An initial step to becoming an ally is grappling with intersectionality. This refers to the examination of race, sex, gender, class, nationality, sexual orientation, and still other categories of experience, all at the same time. Intersectional theory explains that these identities are interconnected, as are the structures that oppress them (racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, or xenophobia) so that individuals can exist at an intersection of one of these sites of oppression. Examination of one cannot happen exclusive of the others in developing a nuanced understanding of the historical forces creating the conditions for oppressed populations and marginalized communities.

Popular goals of community-based practice are social justice, critical thinking skills, communication skills, identity development, community-building, aesthetic instruction, and political agency. Therefore, a project can be heavily impacted by a community-based artist's comprehensions of their own positionality with regard to institutional power and structural bias. Indeed, identity is forged by one's positionality within a society, which includes a political socialization. Urban youth are socialized in a manner to obscure agency and identity within a

specific social/political/cultural situation, however. In the interest of developing goals that assist youth in navigating institutional power, engaged artists familiar with the notion will best serve.

Dialogic Process: Within US educational systems, the theory of arts instruction is informed by mainstream standards that have become significant influences on community-based practice. At the same time, engaged art-making is also often informed by political ideologies critical of mainstream standards. The option available to community-based artists is critical pedagogy methodology and the dialogic process model. A critical pedagogy standard for community-based practice requires establishment of a common vocabulary, sensibility, and conceptualization of process, which in turn assists in defining expectations for the various roles and for the pedagogy of the process. Finding this common vocabulary requires dialogue.

Paolo Freire's dialogic approach argues that participating as equal co-learners to create social knowledge challenges 1) teachers to understand that students are experts of their own lived experience and 2) students to discern that they have a unique authority in learning relationships and in a broader social context. Freire explains that it is through the practice of dialogics that conventional notions of power between teacher and students can be transgressed. Freire writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that "[t]hrough dialogue, the teacher-of-the students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges; teacher-student with student-teacher" (61). Dialogics accomplish the difficult task of opening discussions and offer students the opportunity to engage in the practice of critical thinking. The most important aspect of that Freire posits with dialogic process is the use of it as a pedagogical tool to build empowerment, critical-thinking and critical consciousness.

Indeed, critical pedagogy as a discipline is the most accomplished methodology leading to individual political consciousness and agency and is a forerunner to critical media literacy. Engaged art-making, when integrated with critical pedagogy, has the capacity to address the development of individual agency—such is the case with critical media literacy. Note that, marginalized populations are confronted by institutional power in their everyday lives, so for artists to not engage with criticality in their collaboration runs the risk of recapitulating dominant ideology and hegemonic power structures. Youth art intervention goals can confront structural issues through a dialogic project design that reflects understanding of the structural oppressions.

Salient to community-based artists is Freire's assertion of dialogic process as a foundational principle in cultural work and cultural production with marginalized communities. Artist practice of dialogics in generative process has a unique potency in collaboration because the approach can provide youth with the opportunity to create new knowledge and articulate new meaning about their social experiences. The dialogic collaborative aspect of process can also offer opportunities to develop new strategies for decentralizing notions of power and creating new epistemologies to challenge the dominant order. Placing these demands on community-based practice will require a deliberate synthesis of these principles. Dialogic training will help establish a common vocabulary, sensibility, and set of approaches to conceptualizing complicated processes. In turn, common frames will lead to defining expectations of practitioners and the pedagogy of the process.

Conscious Community: Community occurs in a space that is continuous, connected, complicated, historical, and paved by economic and political relations, all in a socially and spatially interconnected world. Generally, communities can be defined by wide networks of social

relations where cultural, political, and economic relations link people. Community is both a process and a consequence, a product of that process where individual experiences become shared knowledge, where markers of identity (such as race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, religion, class) resonate and rebound to nuance the broader process at an individual level. Will Power's approach to developing community is based on dialogue and the decentralizing of power. In the work of creating a conscious community, the identification of community and the creation of community are understood as collective endeavors. Community emerges from a weaving of shared socio-political circumstances, shared place, shared time, and shared communication experiences. It is not a conglomeration of homogenous individuals, whether influenced by geography, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, sexuality, or disability.

Urban culture innately consists of individuals participating in multiple communities, simultaneously. As each of the communities that individuals hold membership within slip into and out of the other, the unique qualities of each becomes difficult to discern. Conscious community is built when several individuals 1) collectively agree to create a community together with specific traits; 2) deliberately engage in a mindful and mutually reciprocal process of communication and interaction to instill those traits into their community; and 3) reflect collectively on the continued collective desirability of these traits, on each other's practice of them, and collectively decide to revise or adjust according to the needs of the conscious community.

Action is the key convention of Will Power To Youth's community. Their effectiveness as a youth development program stems from these deliberate steps to create the circumstances to define the meaning of a community and to hold each other accountable for bringing that

definition to life. The collaborators, youth and adults, novices and veterans, decide upon a collective set of communication guidelines to serve as the frame of their community.

Empowerment: As, I discussed earlier, the connections between art pedagogy and empowerment processes have been under-theorized in both community-based arts and social sciences. The definition of empowerment remains an elusive one, but two case studies help to reveal certain aspects of art-making practice and collaboration that can catalyze change. Here, I will review these to underscore the importance of formulating theoretically grounded definitions of efficacy and assessment in community-based art-making with youth. Note that the progress of the STAHR! program was interrupted by circumstances that leave me unclear as to what impact the program design could have had on the general sense of empowerment among the youth in the program. What remains clear is that most felt a shift in their perception of media and in their potential to becoming filmmakers and artists.

The influence on empowerment seems clearer regarding the results from Project ABLE and Will Power, in particular. A general summary of the two case studies presented in this dissertation is the sense of personal power that marginalized youth developed from building a strong team, addressing a larger social issue together with that team, and focusing that team work upon a singular art goal that is then shared with a wider audience. The key features of these programs are that the project designs structured the relationships youth were able to build with adults as well as with other youth. Each of the three programs developed rituals to facilitate in the creation of shared communication practices and values so that participants took on ownership of the interactions, gradually relying less and less on the adults to facilitate the interactions. This was a fundamental element of the project for both. The dynamics of those relationships reflect a

nuanced agglomeration of boundaries and intimacy in support of youth identity-making as an individual process, one where adult mentors/artists recognized the agency and capabilities of youth; where adults/artists offer opportunities and insight, while respecting that this process must be self-driven for participants. In each project, youth were asked to make contributions that challenged them to perform beyond what they were accustomed to. Simultaneously they were taught skills in order to support their work and were also applicable to their own empowerment.

Specifically, this general structure of the programs resonate with the Ghose model, which explains that the formation of empowerment occurs simultaneous to 1) the formation of “boundaries [which] differentiate” a mobilized group from outsiders; 2) collaborative work that infuses its meaning in a group identification, and 3) “the negotiation of identity where it is made visible and politicized to the outside world” (Ghose, et al, 2008). The model emphasizes that a sense of connection and group identity develops from working together on a goal to address structural change. In addition, the collaborative quality of the work goals creates a set of shared values that reinforces the new group identity. These values speak to the priorities of working together against a dominant outside group. As the work develops, the group becomes aware of sharing an identity that is rooted in “their group affiliation and collective action” (Ghose, et al, 2008) and this contributes to a shared sense of social capital that did not previously exist.

Further, with regard to the story telling aspects of both Project ABLE and Will Power, the Ghose model explains how the sharing of personal narratives is pivotal to collective empowerment. Personal stories of lived experience within shared social conditions helps to develop a shared meaning in that they contribute to the development of a new critical consciousness about society. The sharing of these stories and asserting the reality faced within the stories is a challenge to the dominant group, a political articulation of individual and

collective identity, to others. This is the important aspect of this component, which is that sharing community issues while utilizing personal narratives with an outside group, either to a “receptive” (Ghose, et al, 2008) group or an “oppositional” (Ghose, et al, 2008) one forges a group identity, cultivates relational social capital, and increases group empowerment.

One other aspect of each of the Project ABLE and Will Power programs was the time that youth were given to consider and unpack the role of decision making and choice in their lives. Either set of youth groups existed at opposing ends of a twenty-year time frame, however, both groups of youth represent urban marginalized populations. They reflected individuals who were neither encouraged nor empowered to make ambitious plans about their lives. Each program in the constructing of narratives asked youth to consider the circumstances of the stories and, in so doing, taught youth how to apply their imaginations to their own narratives, and to reevaluate how they understood their own stories. Naila Kabeer’s theory I believe applies to this aspect of these programs. Where the Ghose groups’ theory helps to illuminate the impact of the structure of these programs on youth, Kabeer’s theory explains how the pedagogy of creating those narratives and shared values can lead to empowerment.

Kabeer defines empowerment as “the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability” (2002). Her analysis also emphasizes that individuals be able to understand the “interdependence of individual and structural change” (2002) in exerting choice. Decision-making, therefore, will reflect the individual’s capacity to synthesize *resources*, *personal agency*, and a consideration of the *consequences* of their choice. She defines resources “broadly to include not only access, but also future claims, to both material and human social resources;” agency “includes] processes of decision-making, as well as less measurable manifestations of agency such as negotiation,

deception and manipulation;” and *consequences* are configured as outcomes reflecting the “well-being” (Kabeer, 2002) of the individual. *Choice*, she adds is “further qualified by referring to the conditions of choice, its content and consequences. These qualifications represent an attempt to incorporate the structural parameters of individual choice” (Kabeer, 2002).

Her definition of empowerment requires a comprehensive understanding of options, decision-making, and the consequences of those choices that are supported by both the Project ABLE and Will Power’s process youth afforded opportunities to consider, enact, and reflect upon their decisions personal conduct, interpersonal interactions, and explore a personal sense of self, their collaborative teams, and the broader community (neighborhoods) they live in.

Critical Consciousness: Radical Maneuver and Fundamental Goal

Critical consciousness describes an active utilization of critical thinking skills as they are applied to individual and structural levels of experience. Combined, these seven radical maneuvers are a pragmatic approach to building critical consciousness for urban youth. These help build the tools to assist working class youth of color in navigating the structures of power that they are most often confronted by. *Conscientização* (in the original Portuguese) or conscientization or critical consciousness, is a Freirean notion and is therefore a goal of the critical pedagogy ideologies already discussed. To review, critical pedagogy theorizes that the transgression of traditional power dynamics is essential in the student-teacher relationship.

The work of critical pedagogy (understanding institutional power, interrogating cultural work, dialogic process, critical self-reflectivity, community-building) invites that all participate as equal co-learners to create social knowledge to develop critical thinking skills. In the long term, the goal of critical thinking is to parlay this into critical consciousness among participants

so that they are quipped to unpack the root causes of their own positionality. Learning such a practice equips individuals and communities with the power to unpack social issues, institutional power, and structural oppression. Pivotal in this is that people participate in identifying the issues to be addressed through critical dialogue, engaging in dialogic processes to best envision strategies for lasting individual and community change.

Community-based artists and art facilitators can best assist youth in this development through a rigorous and committed individual practice of critical self-reflection – artists, essentially need to practice a deep consideration of their own relationship to power and their understanding of difference. This is important within the contexts of community engagement, however, to best cultivate such a practice, this approach is best developed as a generalized practice. Such self-awareness is essential to developing a nuanced understanding of the limits, obligations, and ethics of critical educational practices in marginalized communities. Otherwise, these distinctions remain latent throughout multiple facets of the project, e.g., the framing of art collaboration; the definitions of “good” art product; the structures of collaboration; the terms of relationships, etc. The artists’ power in making these choices speaks volumes to youth community members regarding their skill level, the aesthetics, the labor, their worth, their potential and the role their community or population plays in the broader fields of cultural production and representation.

Community-based art-making as a field, and these case studies particularly, have a history that begins with social justice. This legacy makes these deep considerations relevant and necessary. These would be in keeping with the long tradition of artists in the United States using their work as a platform for social movements, speaking truth to power and democratizing access to cultural production. It is in this realm of understanding social justice and activist culture that

we can begin to understand the relevance of insisting that community-based artists maintain a political consciousness when engaged in such collaborations. The only trick of assisting this process among youth is that artists must model the practice themselves if they are to assist youth to cultivate their own critical consciousness. To affect change, the artist must be aware of the social conditions of a community and hone a political acuity to work toward social justice. Practicing these theories, strategies, and tactics offers artists the capacity to develop a sophisticated and nuanced responsiveness to better serve urban youth, especially youth from working class communities of color, in a world that is *dis-empowering* them to death.

LA To Baltimore: Twenty-Three Years And Three Thousand Miles Later

I mentioned earlier that I led the Will Power Group through an exercise in summer of 2013 to illustrate the impact of institutional power. The exercise I used was a version of something titled “Cross The Line.” Participating in it initiated a discussion about how they experience the effects of institutional oppression within their own households. “Cross the Line” is a tool that I, and Will Power, have inherited from our affiliation with the National Conference for Community and Justice. I used it that day because it helps illustrate vividly institutional power by drawing a graphic picture of the material effects of structural oppression. It also works well to scaffold writing- and theater-based explorations of the same issues. I and three other art facilitators led the exercise. We first directed the group’s attention to a set of national statistics as a baseline: The 2010 US Census data states that the US population, according to race/ethnicity, is 63% white; 13.1% African-American; 16.9% Hispanic/Latino; 5.1% Asian/Pacific Islander/South East Asian; 1.2% Native American/American Indian; and 2.4% biracial/multiracial (US Census, 2010). With regard to gender, the facilitators and I let them know that according to the 2010 US

Census girls, young women, and adult women comprised 50.8% of the total population while boys, young men, and adult men comprised 49.2% of the total population (US Census, 2010).

I followed these statistics with a second set to detail the disproportionate bias in several institutional systems. We presented these to illustrate racial biases in the juvenile justice system: “Black and Hispanic students represent more than 70% of those involved in school-related arrests or referrals to law enforcement. Currently, African Americans make up two-fifths and Hispanics one-fifth of confined youth today” (americanprogress.org, 2013); “The US Sentencing Commission stated that in the federal system black offenders receive sentences that are 10 percent longer than white offenders for the same crimes” (americanprogress.org, 2013); “A report by the Department of Justice found that blacks and Hispanics were approximately three times more likely to be searched during a traffic stop than white motorists” (americanprogress.org, 2013); “96,000 students were arrested and 242,000 were referred to law enforcement by schools during the 2009-10 school year. Of those students, black and Hispanic students made up more than 70 percent of arrested or referred students” (americanprogress.org, 2013); “According to the FBI, although hate crimes statistics have generally gone down in the last decade, the number of hate crimes committed against Latinos and those perceived to be immigrants has increased about 5% every year since 2003” (civilrights.org, 2013).

We presented them with the following figures to illustrate the biases faced by sexual minority youth: “9 out of 10 LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered] teens have reported being bullied at school within the past year because of their sexual orientation. Out of those numbers, almost half have reported being physically harassed followed by another quarter who reported actually being physically assaulted” (bullyingstatistics.org, 2013); “Other homeless youth are forced to leave home because of their sexual orientation. As many as 25% of

LGBT teens are rejected by their families, and many end up homeless on the streets”
(dosomething.org, 2013).

Finally, we presented these statistics to illustrate the biases against women that reflect differences in personal safety and pay equity: “In 2009, women’s median weekly earnings were only 80.2% of men’s median weekly earnings. For most women of color, the earnings gap was even larger: African American women earned 71 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2009. Hispanic and Latina women earned just 62 cents for every dollar men earned” (pay-equity.org, 2012); “1 out of every 6 American women has been the victim of a sexual assault” (rainn.org, 2013); “17.7 million American women have been victims of sexual assault” (rainn.org, 2013); “On average, 9 of every 10 people every year who experience a sexual assault are female” (rainn.org, 2013); “4 out of 10 sexual assaults take place at the home of the victim” (rainn.org, 2013).

The youth saw their own lives in these statistics. A vast majority experienced a number of realities in their own lives that were reflected in the numbers listed above: foster care; gun violence; alcoholism or addiction in the family; physical, emotional, sexual abuse; being profiled by store owners, police, or school officials; harassment from school security and police officers; poverty. They expressed that these statistics were in now way a surprise, they knew world didn’t seem to think they were valuable. However, it was not my or the staff’s goal to simply ensure that they know the data. Our goal was to help them build their own critical consciousness, to understand the structural issues, and how it was within their power to create social change to affect those structural issues. More importantly, in developing critical consciousness they also learned that they were entitled to have dreams and ambitions; to live the lives they wanted for themselves.

In the two years since the summer of 2013, there have been consistent stories in the news of police officers fatally shooting or injuring unarmed people of color from across the United States. In US English language news, the most notable cases are Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, and Freddie Gray. (There are still several more stories of other people of color that have not hit the mainstream news whose stories are not worth broadcasting because they involve women of color and/or monolingual Spanish speakers who are undocumented.) The deaths of these men, many caught on smart phone cameras, are sparking demonstrations across the country within communities of color and among their allies. As I sit writing at the end of April 2015, events are unfolding in Baltimore, Maryland that conjure the same events which occurred in April 1992, in Los Angeles, exactly twenty years ago. The responses across the nation to the violent events that have occurred have catalyzed a movement for social justice. This movement has gained momentum from a growing collective critical consciousness. Community-based artists have the potential to support more youth in their own development of critical consciousness, which is why this is the most crucial aspect of any art-based educational program for urban youth.

The reality that we cannot escape is that the events affecting urban youth of color today are filled with intensity, joy, celebration, violence, support, isolation, and trauma. Community-based art-making and art intervention practice has the capacity to support youth through these circumstances by connecting art-making process to its elemental function as culture-, community-, and identity-making. The formal structures of community-based art-making practices are strong and flexible enough to integrate with other fields. In so doing, community-based practice can serve traditional art-making, as well as goals specific to youth development, health promotion, education, and social justice. Intervention projects can operate with any

number of foci, while simultaneously supporting individual growth and community-building. Such projects can include, as strategies, facilitated discussions to enhance critical thinking skills. Adult mentors, educators, and teaching artists can be trained to facilitate the process of individual and collective growth that evolves from both creative and discursive process. Moreover, interventions, when integrated with critical theories to develop pedagogy, can support the development of critical consciousness and self-empowerment while reinforcing the skills youth already possess. These are fundamental to enhancing the functions of community-based practice.

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