

From Foucault to Shange:
A Multidisciplinary Study Exploring the Nature of Empowerment
Through an Analysis of Theatres of Resistance

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by
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Abstract:

Empowerment is a frequently used but ambiguous term. This capstone project investigates empowerment in multiple contexts through a series of multidisciplinary inquiries. Critical texts are used to build a framework to analyze power, empowerment and scripted plays from theatre of resistance traditions. The goal of this study is to explore the nature of empowerment in order to build a theoretical framework that can be used to analyze the ways in which theatrical works critique and confront social institutions and forces of institutionalized oppression, as opposed to reflecting them.

This research is relevant for arts administrators because the concept of empowerment is often used in addressing issues of accessibility, participation, and representation. But empowerment remains a contested subject within the arts mainly because it is difficult to define and hard to measure in terms of outcomes.

Introduction to This Study:

This capstone project explores the possibilities for empowerment in theatre projects. First, facilitated readings of Foucault, and feminist appropriations of Foucault's work, are used to build a philosophical framework for discussing empowerment through institutional structures and social relations that constitute power. Foucault's theories, and feminist interpretations of his work, focus on structural views of social relations that often overlook individual lived experience, which makes the possibility for resistance problematic. However, this body of literature critically analyzes subjectivity and personal agency within frameworks of psychoanalysis, sociology and political theory that provide useful insights that can be applied to issues of resistance and empowerment. Further, these theories can be applied to a textual analysis of plays within the theatre for resistance field. Additional course work in theatre for social resistance is used to analyze the possibilities for empowerment in four selected plays: Bertolt Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1981), Maria Irene Fornes' *The Conduct of Life* (1995), Samia Qazmouz Bakri's *The Alley* (2003) and Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* (1997). Four main elements that open a space for empowerment in theatre of resistance will be explored through a textual analysis of the plays. These elements include: 1) theatre for social resistance critiques mainstream discourses on matters such as ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, religion and gender that define what is acceptable and unacceptable in any given culture. Critique disrupts these deeply ingrained notions, and brings the foundations and construction of norms and power into question (Foucault, 1984; Boal, 1985; Kristeva, 1986; Taylor, 2003); 2) theatre for social resistance

reconfigures mainstream notions of the speaking subject and gives voices to silenced stories (Kristeva, 1986); 3) theatres of resistance are rooted in specific social circumstances, and serve to both construct and question issues of identity through the narratives of plays (Burnham, 2003; Geer, 1998; Taylor, 2003) and 4) theatre of resistance physically reenacts lived experiences within the context of the performers' voices and bodies; from this experience concrete strategies for change can be imagined and put into action beyond the performance (Burnham, 2003; Geer, 1998; Taylor, 2003). This study concludes with a synthesis across these fields of inquiry to address the ways in which the plays that are analyzed in this study open up possibilities for empowerment. These analyses provide insights for developing theatre projects that encourage critical thought and insight into multiple points of view on social issues.

Research Scope and Intent

An exploratory approach is used in this capstone project, incorporating literature and course work from varied disciplines. In facilitated readings with philosophy professor Dr. Bonnie Mann Foucault and feminist interpretations of his work were read and discussed texts included excerpts from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975), *Power/Knowledge* (1980) and *The History of Sexuality* (1978). Feminist interpretations of Foucault's theories included work by Sandra Lee Bartky, Jana Sawicki, Monique Deveaux and Judith Butler. In the graduate-level English course Theatres of Resistance, taught by Dr. Linda Kintz, readings included theoretical texts by Julia Kristeva, Kaja Silverman, Zygmunt Bauman, Augusto Boal, Walter Mignolo and Walter Benjamin, and plays and performance pieces by Bertolt Brecht, Maria Irene Fornes, Caryl Churchill, Dario Fo, Tony Kushner, Zora

Neale Hurston, Luis Valdez and Spiderwoman Theatre.

The primary goal of the research is to gain insight on topics that are not often connected and that are new areas of inquiry for me. I am aware that research in the fields of community cultural development, theatre pedagogy and research in community-based theatre are applicable to my research goals, however this study focuses on specific themes that can be inferred across the bodies of literature included in the course work. Of course, my personal biases as a researcher affect the scope of this study as well. I am critical of traditional approaches to empowerment and feel that many accepted practices are harmful and humiliating. I have used critical texts across disciplines to build a framework to analyze power, empowerment and scripted plays from theatre of resistance traditions. My goal is to explore the nature of empowerment in order to build a theoretical framework that can be used to analyze the ways in which theatrical works critique and confront social institutions and forces of institutionalized oppression, as opposed to reflecting them.

The goal of this study is to present analyses of theatrical approaches to empowerment in an integrated fashion that will inspire others to do further research on the topics involved. My hope is that these insights will invigorate the work of performing artists, playwrights, educators, activists and arts programming staff who are in search of new ways to approach social issues and issues of empowerment in performance-based projects.

Organization of the Study:

This study is organized in the following way. First I will present my research on questions of the nature of empowerment through methods in social service practice and how these findings can be used when approaching or analyzing theatres

of resistance. Second, I will present my research on the constitution of power according to Foucault and feminist interpretations of his work and what these theories offer to the development of a philosophical framework for empowerment in relation to theatre of resistance.

Section I: Questioning the Nature of Empowerment

Empowerment is a frequently used but ambiguous term. As I thought more about the concept of empowerment, I kept questioning its nature: What is empowerment? A practice, activity, outcome, feeling? What is the relationship between feeling empowered and being empowered? Is empowerment something that happens from the “outside in”—can an arts program empower a participant? Is it possible for one person to empower another?¹ I first investigated the nature of empowerment through research on empowerment methods in social service practice, and found that social service institutions have commonly labeled individuals as “social problems,” and have acted on their behalf without their consent in an attempt to “transform” lives according to institutional norms (Simon, 1994, p. 7). This rationale continues to inform practices that are directly responsible for creating barriers to empowerment for the individuals they are supposed to help (Miley & DuBoise, 1999, p. 4). For example, Simon (1994) asserts:

Members of historically denigrated groups... have decades of direct experience of not being believed, in having their views of reality discounted by authorities whose own experiential truths are often discrepant wholly or in part from those of people who have grown up on the margins of society. Without a fundamental and daily commitment to honoring the variety of clients’ definitions of their own experience, authorities—whether social workers, nurses, physicians, teachers, judges, police officers or politicians—can easily and unwittingly reinforce the self-hatred and self-doubt of members of vulnerable groups simply by failing to take ... [clients’] conceptions of themselves

¹ Special thanks to Dr. Bonnie Mann of the Philosophy department for helping me formulate these questions early in my research.

and their situation seriously. (p. 156)

Miley and DuBoise (1999) offer a good description of how collaborative methods of empowerment in social service practice functions as both a process and an outcome in helping clients achieve their goals. The authors describe phases of dialogue, discovery and development through which social workers help clients articulate aspects of challenging situations and activate interpersonal and institutional resources (p. 7). A client actively participates in the process of empowerment through self-defined goals, means and outcomes (p. 4). According to Miley and DuBoise, the process of empowerment practice is a collaborative partnership between a social worker and client. But Simon (1994) argues that the power relations in social work settings will always be imbalanced; to think that a collaborative partnership could be equal is foolish. Instead, she suggests pursuing “... an ‘equal moral agency’... in which both endorse the equality of dignity and existential human worth of each while simultaneously acknowledging the imbalance of power and authority between them... (p. 12).” Empowerment practices can become a barrier for the client if the social worker interferes with the support networks that the client has already established for himself or herself.

This frame of reference for empowerment has been helpful in guiding my research on theatres of resistance because it has given me a better understanding of what needs to happen in order for empowerment to happen through the arts. It is easy to say that the arts are inherently good and that participation in the arts is empowering. But I question these notions; particularly in terms of the role one person can have in the empowerment process of another. Findings from this inquiry suggest that in order for one person to participate in the empowerment process of another—be it in a social services or theatre—mutual respect and power differences

must be openly acknowledged. Also, in order for empowerment to occur multiple worldviews must be represented and acknowledged as worthy—not just the worldview of the most powerful group involved. Representation of multiple viewpoints and acknowledgement of the power dynamics between people with differing viewpoints is a common thread in the four plays that are analyzed in this study, and the most significant way that theatre of resistance raises awareness and opens space for empowerment to happen.

Section II: Exploring Power through Foucault and Feminist Interpretations of His Work

Since empowerment is a social process, this investigation into questions about the nature of empowerment addresses what constitutes power in society. Foucault's work explores the social structures and institutions of power and the complicated social relations that both support and produce those structures. The concept of power is present in all of our lived experiences and in our subconscious fears and fantasies (Sawicki, 1996, p. 165). But the nature of power outside of political or economic contexts is a slippery subject. Michel Foucault was an iconoclastic man who created quite a stir in 20th century philosophy. Most critiques of his work focus on the dangers of relativism, nihilism, and pessimism often found in his texts (Sawicki, p. 164). Sawicki (1996) explains, "...*Discipline and Punish* was not intended as a portrait of the whole of modern society, but rather a genealogy of the emergence of the perfectly administered one (p. 164)." As May (2005) notes, "He seeks within the specific given arrangements and constraints to which we are subject, to locate a space of resistance to those constraints... (p. 293)" Sawicki and May's arguments frame the ways in which Foucault's work identifies and critiques

the constraining institutions and social relations of society in order to make resistance to them possible. In order to find the “space of resistance” within Foucault’s work, it is necessary to analyze the complex constraints on freedom that he discusses in the majority of his work.

According to Foucault (1984), power and knowledge are developed in institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons and factories. These bodies of knowledge are produced through a “microphysics of power” (p. 174), which can be likened to the branch of physics it is named after. But rather than focusing on the properties and interactions of microscopic and subatomic particles, Foucault’s theory focuses on the minute social relations that affect the enactment and transmission of this power/knowledge paradigm. In this framework, power is not seen as something relegated to the dominant class who preserve and wield influence on others in order to secure authority. Instead power is a force that is constructed, enacted and transmitted through the institutions, social structures, dominant rhetoric, means of communications, as well as the physical and psychic levels that constitute life (p. 174). The primary means of support for developing knowledge and power on the microphysical level is the control of human bodies. Control is accomplished through forms of “disciplinary coercion” (Foucault, 1984, p. 182) in which students, patients, prisoners and workers are trained to obey. This process makes the person subjected to these forces more docile and “useful” to the institution they are interacting within, while it decreases the person’s ability to leverage the institution on their own behalf (p. 182). Forms of disciplinary coercion are based on constant surveillance and an attention to detail. The use of excessive force or violence to ensure obedience is not necessary because there is no escape from the gaze of others (p. 193).

Foucault identifies five functions of disciplinary coercion: comparing

individual actions to the norm of the group, differentiating individuals according to a governing principle or expected outcome, measuring the “correctness” of individuals in quantitative terms and hierarchizing them in terms of their abilities (pp. 195-197). Disciplinary coercion is very common in educational, work, and psychiatric and correctional environments. Forms of disciplinary coercion such as constant surveillance, and the comparison, hierarchizing and pathologizing of behavior contribute to what Foucault terms the process of normalization, in which forms of discipline and social norms are internalized and seem “natural.” This process effectively and efficiently supports the exclusion of abnormal individuals who cannot or will not become homogenized (p. 195).

Sandra Bartky (1990) argues that through normalization, internalized standards and norms become the basis for compulsive self-regulation, especially for women (p. 65). In terms of the body’s relation to power, Bartky argues that women are far more restricted than men in the way they move and occupy space. Men take longer strides in proportion to their body size than women, and men tend to be more at ease when taking up space while sitting and standing (p. 67). Bartky argues that disciplinary practices applied to body language, movement, grooming and body shape are part of the process by which the ideal feminine body is constructed. Unfortunately, any woman who internalizes these norms and tries to achieve these standards is destined to fail to some degree because feminine perfection is an unattainable ideal. This fact contributes to the self-consciousness, shame and hatred many women feel toward their bodies (p. 71). The fashion, beauty, diet and pharmaceutical industries are pervasive throughout Western culture and in the media. The messages of these commercial forms of discourse in advertising are relentless and abundant in every social context from shopping for groceries, to

visiting the doctor or driving down the freeway. Every part and function of a woman's body are specified as potential problems that threaten a woman's sexual desirability, and the success of her career, relationships, marriage and family. Men are also pressured by the messages of advertising, but not as overtly in terms of their bodies and identities. The ideal lean and muscular body for men is unattainable, but just because a guy is overweight or balding doesn't mean he is categorically unworthy of success or lacks sexual desirability in the dominant social discourses.

Given all of the pressures of normalization and disciplinary coercion that Foucault believes individuals face in school, in their doctor's office, in their careers and in their relationships, one would think that the disciplinary techniques of the family would be the main argument in his discussion of the formation of the subject. After all, isn't the family an institution governed by the same rules as the society that legitimizes it? Although Foucault argues that the subject is formed in subjectivity, he doesn't pinpoint where the subject emerges. Judith Butler firmly places the emergence of the subject within the context of the family. As Butler (1997) explains:

No subject emerges without a passionate attachment to the people they are dependent upon.... the formation of primary passion renders the child vulnerable to subordination and exploitation... this situation of primary dependency conditions the political formation and regulation of subjects and becomes the means of their subjection. (p.7)

Butler agrees with Foucault that this subjectivity must be denied in order for the subject to emerge (p. 9), but she goes further in arguing that in order for the subject to exist, the desire to question the family pressures or abuse one endures has to be curbed or else a child is threatened with a disintegration of the self (p. 9). An inner

conflict between rejecting one's parents or primary care giver and maintaining an emotional connection to them is integral to maintaining a sense of self (p. 9). Butler then asks, "If subordination is the condition for the possibility for agency, how can agency be considered in opposition to subordination? (p. 10)" In order to oppose subordination and gain a sense of personal agency, a child must constantly repeat and live through the conditions of its subordination, which produces the ambivalence of the emerging subject. There is a space for resistance in this process because although the child retains the conditions of its emergence on an emotional or psychic level, it doesn't mean that its agency remains tied to those conditions or that the conditions don't change as more acts of agency are undertaken (p. 12). Butler explains the process and relationship between the emergence of the subject and finding agency:

The subject emerges as both the effect of a prior power and as the condition of possibility for a radically conditioned form of agency... At some point a reversal and concealment occurs, and power emerges as what belongs to the subject... What the subject enacts is enabled but not constrained by the prior working of power... Agency exceeds the power by which it is enabled. (p. 14)

Butler explains that in order to oppose the abuses of power subjects have to recognize that they are vulnerable to the desire to be accepted within the bounds of social norms. It is necessary to recognize that while the desire for recognition is natural, it is also problematic for taking up resistance and change (p. 16). This is a post-liberatory stance that makes a lot of sense. In order for change to happen, a subject doesn't have to completely reject the conditions of their oppression. In fact, articulating how those conditions still function within a person's life and psyche are part of making lasting changes, whether in terms of personal agency, rehabilitation or community building. Butler finally asks, "How can we performatively reconfigure

the contours of the conditions of life? (p. 28)” Theater is one way to performatively express the challenges of life, and open possibilities for changing the life conditions of the participants involved in creating, performing and witnessing these performances and the dialogues they encourage.

Section III: The Relationship Between Theatre of Resistance and Empowerment

Theatre of resistance has taken many forms throughout the world and is often part of larger social movements such as the Palestinian cause in Israel (Nassar, 2006; Bakri, 2003) and the African-American feminist movement (Bambara, 1976; Hurston, 1991; Shange, 1997). Lo and Gilbert (2002) define theatre of resistance as being “...driven by a political imperative to interrogate the cultural hegemony that underlies imperial systems of governance, education, social and economic organization, and representation (p. 35).” While some theatre of resistance projects incorporate music, dance, comedy and other performance modes found in mainstream theatre productions, there are four main elements of resistance theatre that interrogate hegemonic values and make resistance to oppression and opportunities for empowerment possible. These are: 1) theatre for social resistance critiques mainstream discourses, disrupts deeply ingrained notions, and brings the foundations and construction of norms and power into question (Foucault, 1984; Boal, 1985; Kristeva, 1986; Taylor, 2003); 2) theatre for social resistance reconfigures mainstream notions of the speaking subject and gives voices to silenced stories (Kristeva, 1986); 3) theatres of resistance are rooted in specific social circumstances, and serve to both construct and question issues of identity through the narratives of plays (Burnham, 2003; Geer, 1998; Taylor, 2003) and 4) theatre of resistance physically reenacts lived experiences within the context of the performers’

voices and bodies; from this experience concrete strategies for change can be imagined and put into action beyond the performance (Burnham, 2003; Geer, 1998; Taylor, 2003).

I will use a textual analysis of four selected plays to illustrate each of these four elements of resistance within the social circumstances and theoretical framework each play was written in.

Critiquing Mainstream Discourses: Brecht's Dialectical Theatre

Playwright Bertolt Brecht believed that the discourses of mainstream historical narratives only seem natural and true because they have been constructed as a linear progression by the “victors.” He wanted to use theatre as a critique of linear history (Brecht, 1964). Marx’s philosophy of dialectical materialism² influenced Brecht’s work, which treats history as a series of social situations filled with inconsistencies where “... nothing exists that isn’t in disharmony with itself (Brecht, 1964, p. 192).” Brecht hoped that dialectical theatre³ could be used to untangle illusions in social relations and in the dominant historical narrative by breaking down the illusions posited by dramatic realism in mainstream theatre. Brecht was critical of dramatic realism, the dominant theatre mode from the turn of the 19th century to WWII, because it

...aimed at smoothing over contradictions, at creating false harmony, at idealization. Conditions are reported as if they could not be otherwise;

² According to The American Heritage Dictionary, dialectical materialism is “The Marxian interpretation of reality that views... all change as the product of a constant conflict between opposites arising from the internal contradictions inherent in all events, ideas, and movements.” (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Retrieved June 07, 2006, from <http://www.answers.com/topic/dialectical-materialism>)

³ According to Wikipedia, dialectical theatre “...assumes that the purpose of a play... is to present ideas and invite the audience to make judgments on them. Characters are not intended to mimic real people, but to represent opposing sides of an argument, archetypes, or stereotypes. (Wikipedia. Retrieved June 07, 2006, from <http://www.answers.com/topic/epic-theater>)

characters as individuals, incapable by definition of being divided... If there is a development it is always steady never by jerks... None of this is like reality, so a realistic theatre must give it up. (Brecht, 1964, p. 277)

Brecht wrote plays with the intent that they would be revised for new historical situations (Diamond, 1988, p. 87), which is one element of his work that opens possibilities for critiquing mainstream discourses. For example, Brecht's play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* was written in 1940 while he and his wife and child were living in Finland as political refugees from Nazi Germany. This cautionary political parable was inspired by Hitler's rise to power in Germany and makes clear delineations of instances when public officials could have resisted the rise of Ui/Hitler.

Certain aspects of the play are eerily similar George W. Bush's rise to power, which make clear arguments for political resistance. *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* has had a revival in productions in the U. S. since 9/11 (Denton, 2002; Heflin, 2005; Jenkins, 2002; Schindler, 2004). The most highly acclaimed production was staged by the National Actor's Theatre in New York with Al Pacino starring as Arturo Ui. This show opened in October 2001 with a continuous run through November 2002. Seattle's Capitol Hill Arts Center's production ran in August 2004, and received praise in *the Seattle Weekly* for the work's relevance to current events:

Arturo Ui is a small-time criminal with giant aspirations. He isn't much to look at, and his elocution sucks, but he surrounds himself with smarter, bigger men and eventually transforms his charisma into snarling menace. The method to his madness: keeping the proletariat of Cicero, Ill., in a state of uncertainty and fear, so he can sell them "protection" from the very danger he's created. Sound familiar? When Ui makes blustery pronouncements like "Those who are not for me are against me," the temporal gap between World War II and recent events closes instantly. After all, George W. Bush's rise to power was every bit as resistible as Ui's—which is to say, a little less corruption on all sides could have prevented it... (Schindler, 2004)

The dialectic nature of Brecht's ...*Arturo Ui* is frighteningly appealing to politically frustrated audiences today because it simultaneously critiques the allure Adolph Hitler's fascist propaganda had in Germany in the late-1930s while satirizing George W. Bush's rise to power in the United States. Brecht wrote this play before the rise of the Third Reich as a warning sign of the terror to come. He wasn't able to publish or produce the play until Hitler's reign had ended. When performed in contemporary American theatres *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* is an act of resistance because it critiques the dialogue of mainstream American propaganda—such as the nightly news—to make the argument that we are living in a self-imposed state of emergency that is perpetuated by political apathy and fear. McNulty's (2003) critique on the state of affairs in political theatre today describes this conundrum accurately:

Critical, rather than dogmatic, thought is what our culture sorely lacks.... The function of serious theater and criticism is to wage war on the clichéd structures of perception that perpetuate the untruths we tell ourselves. If the arts have any social utility (mootest of all points), it perhaps lies in the cultivation of a pattern of mind that, valuing complexity, rejects the appeal of soppy testimonials, quick fixes, and reductive slogans. (McNulty, 2003)

Theatre of resistance can offer a step toward critical thinking, which is the first step in becoming politically aware and active.

Reconfiguring Established Notions of The Speaking Subject: Kristeva and The Female Subject in Fornes' *The Conduct of Life*

Theatre for social resistance reconfigures mainstream notions of the speaking subject⁴ and gives voice to silenced stories. In order to discuss the speaking subject in theatre for social resistance, it is necessary to unravel the process of language acquisition and the formation of the speaking subject. I will use Julia Kristeva's

⁴ The speaking subject is a concept in psychoanalytic theory that positions the role of speaking in the formation of the self. (Pateman, 2004)

essays *Revolution of Poetic Language* (1986) and *The System and The Speaking Subject* (1986) as a theoretical framework to discuss the use of language and issues of the female speaking subject in *The Conduct of Life* (1995) by Cuban-American playwright Maria Irene Fornes.

The social process of language acquisition is important to understand in terms of theatre of resistance because language is inherently value laden and theatre is one way to question the values implied in language and the privileged speaking subject. According to Kristeva (1986), "...concrete operations precede the acquisition of language, and organize pre-verbal semiotic⁵ space according to logical categories... (p. 94)." There is no inherent relation between symbol and word, so how does a child become capable of linguistic exchange? Kristeva argues that each person goes through this process differently depending on the physical and psychological constraints that are placed upon him or her by their parents and family (p. 93). Passage from communicating via facial expressions and cooing, to using language comes about through the transference of intense emotions from being focused on the mother, to being focused on objects in the environment (p. 111). For example, a pre-verbal child who receives everything she needs from her mother will have no need to speak, so she will not become socially encoded to do so. She sees herself as part of her mother at this point. Once a child recognizes she is separate from her mother, she will look at the world in an entirely different way. All of her drive is not focused on her mother, but instead wanders to the outside world and how to get her hands on the objects she desires. If her mother hands the child an object she wants without the child verbalizing what that object is, but just cooing or crying, the child will not

⁵ Kristeva (1986) describes the semiotic as a pre-verbal dimension of language structured by sensory perceptions and the bodily needs of the child, not by language. This is rooted in but very different from the science of semiotics, which is concerned with how meaning is made and understood.

start speaking. On the other hand, if a child is constantly constrained from either the objects she desires or the care she needs by her mother telling her to name the object of desire, she will become verbal more quickly.

Kristeva's point is that language is produced by drives and the social constraint of those drives, which upholds the existing symbolic order: the socially constructed, unconscious connections between symbols and meanings (Silverman, 1992, p. 15). For example, anything out of place in Western culture is equated with the word "dirty." A crumb of food on a plate is accepted, but on your face it is dirty. Clean fingernails are accepted, but clean fingernail clippings are dirty. These judgments are often centered on the body as being dirty, or metaphorically out of place or uncontrollable. This is all due to the binary coding of symbols and the ideological privilege of the purely masculine subject. So, part of the process of becoming a verbal person is unconsciously accepting the symbolic order and all of the psychological baggage and ideologies attached to it.

Kristeva argues that there is room for disruptions of the symbolic order through the "asocial drive" of the artist who consciously transgresses the boundaries of the symbolic order to make new meaning (p. 111). In terms of language, this transgression does not necessarily attach new meanings to words. A transformation of meaning can be expressed through repetition and rhyme. Poets, musicians, artists and actors transgress the symbolic order verbally and non-verbally to create new categories of what is acceptable or unacceptable. Artists reclaim unaccepted or disposable symbols of culture in the form of words and images that they use to create iconography in their work. The original symbol takes on new meanings in the creative process and product. For example, Dario Fo's *We Won't Pay! We Won't Pay!* (2005) uses symbols of food and reproduction, and food and bodily fluids to illustrate

issues of poverty. The lead female character of the play, Antonia, is involved in a riot at the supermarket. All of the women decide they can't and won't pay the high prices for the food they need to feed their families. So in protest they put everything they can under their coats and leave the store en masse. Many pivotal scenes in the play revolve around Antonia's friend Margherita pretending she is pregnant to help Antonia hide the stolen food from her husband and the police. In one scene Margherita drops some of the food and there is pickle juice and sardines all over the floor. She leaves to hide the food in someone's shed, and Antonia has to explain the mess by making up a story that Margherita's water broke and she had to be rushed to the hospital to have the baby. Food and bodily fluids are used as interchangeable symbols, which is very hilarious because the two are symbolic opposites.

Transgressing boundaries of the symbolic order is a crucial part of theatre projects for social resistance, because the body and the spoken word are the main creative components. Through performance, the "residues of the first symbolizations" can be reordered (Kristeva, 1986, p. 111), accepted modes of representation can be questioned publicly and stereotypes can be broken.

There are plenty of "residues" of the symbolic order in Maria Irene Fornes' *The Conduct of Life* (1995), which takes place during the present in an undetermined part of South America. What is certain is that the political system at work in the play is a totalitarian government. The set is very important in conveying the multiple layers of control in the play and the privileged position of the male in the symbolic order. The action takes place in the home of Orlando and Leticia, which consists of a living room, a dining room and a horizontal hallway that connects the servant's quarters with the cellar. Ten feet above the three-tiered stage is the warehouse that is connected to the cellar by a staircase. Unbeknownst to his wife,

Orlando works for the government and tortures people into confessions. This work is carried out in graphic detail in the warehouse on the top level of the stage, which represents Orlando's public life. Ten feet below is the cellar where Orlando keeps a 12-year-old girl named Nena as his sexual slave. This space represents Orlando's secrets and the weaknesses he has to hide in order to maintain his domestic life and public position.

Each of the three female character lives within a specific set of constraints and expectations according to her social status in relation to Orlando and the totalitarian system he represents. Differences in status are articulated through the spaces each character inhabits onstage and through each character's use of language. Instead of fixing her female characters within dialogues that define how each feels about her position in life, Fornes maintains an uncertainty within the dialogue that creates a sense of incompleteness and uneasiness, which opens a space for resistance. At some point during the play each woman's use of language brings about a confrontation that disrupts the values represented by the restrictions that are imposed upon her.

Nena begins as a non-verbal object within the play. I will use her emergence as a speaking character to explore how the women in the play occupy space and use language in relation to one another and in relation to Orlando. Fornes plays with the dualism between Nena as the object and Orlando as the privileged subject in the play in a way that ultimately transgresses the symbolic order of what the spectator/reader might expect and opens the narrative through unexpected points of view. Nena is the character with the lowest social status in the play. She occupies the basement and never utters a full sentence until Scene XV—three-quarters of the way through the one-act script. Up until this point, she is only visible onstage when

Orlando is psychologically, physically or sexually brutalizing her. She is his object of desire, brought to the bowels of his home and hidden away. We are unsure of Nena's life history or the nature of her meeting Orlando. She may be the child of a foreign diplomat who Orlando is trying to control through abusing her.

Nena is set apart from the other characters by her silence. She is only scripted to whimper, scream or cower in parenthetical directions within Orlando's scripted dialogue. For example, in Scene VII Orlando sexually abuses Nena and simultaneously acts protective toward her:

ORLANDO: Look this way I'm going to do something to you. (*She makes a move away from him.*) Don't do that. Don't move away... I just want to put my hand here like this... Don't hold your lips so tight. Make them soft. Let them loose. So I can do this. (*She whimpers.*) Don't cry. I won't hurt you. This is all I'm going to do. Just hold your lips soft. Be nice. Be a nice girl. (*He pushes against her and reaches orgasm. He remains motionless for a moment, then steps away from her still leaning on the wall.*) Go eat. I brought you food. (*She goes to the table. He sits on the floor and watches her eat. She eats voraciously. She looks at the milk.*) Drink it. It's milk. It's good for you. (*She drinks the milk, then continues eating. Lights fade to black.*) (p. 917)

At this point in the play Nena's objectification is complete. She is not only objectified by the sexual violence acted out on her body by Orlando, but within the structure of the text. In the text she is a part of Orlando, a product or symptom of his needs and actions.

But an unexpected conflict brings Nena out of the basement. In Scene XIV, Leticia confronts Orlando about Nena. The fuel for this confrontation is the sound of Nena's screams in the basement as Orlando rapes her. It's clear that Leticia is disgusted by Orlando and by the fact that such brutality could be happening within the walls of their home. Leticia wants the support of her friend Mona who is the only person she speaks openly with in the play. Bringing Mona into the house would put Orlando in a compromising position. He can't risk public knowledge of his behaviors,

so he offers a twisted solution that is obviously made in haste. He will bring Nena out of the basement to work for them as a servant. This is an unexpected turn in the plot that reveals the paranoid logic of Orlando's actions, and signals the beginning of the disintegration of his totalitarian rule of the household. But it also makes a space for Nena to become a speaking subject in the play.

In Scene XV, directly following the quarrel between Leticia and Orlando, Olimpia (the maid) and Nena sit in the center of the domestic space at the dining room table sorting beans. Nena begins to speak in great detail about her life, which gives a whole new context to her role in relation to Orlando:

Nena: I used to clean beans when I was in the home. And also string beans. I also pressed clothes. The days were long. Some girls did hand sewing. ...I didn't like that. ...I like to press because my mind wanders and I find satisfaction. ...I could earn a living pressing clothes. And I could find my grandpa and take care of him.

Olimpia: Where is your grandpa?

Nena: I don't know. ...He sleeps in the streets. Because he's too old to remember where he lives. He needs a person to take care of him. And I can take care of him. ...He lives in the camp for the homeless and he has his own box. ...He took me with him when my mother died until they took me to the home. It is a big box. It's big enough for two. ...The floor is hard for him because he's skinny and it's hard on his poor bones. He could sleep on top of me if that would make him feel comfortable. I wouldn't mind. Except that he may pee on me because he pees his pants. He doesn't know not to. ...His box was a little smelly. But that doesn't matter because I can clean it. (p. 920)

In this scene Nena's litany marks her life experience prior to being found by Orlando, and makes connections between her past and present. For example, Nena is used to taking care of a man who is helpless, and one can certainly argue that Orlando is helpless in his need to control others in order to preserve his ideal masculine identity. The fact that he uses physical force to hurt Nena makes it uncertain whether she is aware of Orlando's weaknesses. But as Butler (1997) argues, in the process of becoming a speaking subject, a pre-verbal human continually reiterates the constraints of their subjectivity (p. 12). This ambivalent

condition of the emergence of the subject is brought to life very clearly in the *The Conduct of Life*, especially in the character of Nena. Part of Nena's struggle to become humanized in the play is her struggle to have a voice outside the parenthetical stage directions in Orlando's dialogue. The details she discloses to Olimpia about her past opens a space for the reader/spectator to construct a logic for her position in relation to Orlando. The conditions of Nena's childhood with her grandfather are very similar to the conditions of her captivity by Orlando. In both situations taking care of a man's needs and being subjected to his desires and bodily fluids are conditions for survival. It is easy to see the connection between these two parts of Nena's life and how they have contributed to her social position among the women in the play and her role as the catalyst that breaks down the thin lines of demarcation between the public and private spheres of Orlando's life. The two women who he has hurt the most unravel the paranoid logic of the symbolic order of hyper-masculinity and a totalitarian state through their personal agency as speaking subjects. Fornes' female characters transgress the symbolic order of the totalitarian state and the privileged male speaking subject through the language they use, and especially through Nena's emergence as a speaking subject.

This play is a good example of how theatre can be used to address difficult issues and make room for critical awareness of social issues through the voices of represses or unheard stories. For example, in 2000, a performance of *The Conduct of Life* was produced in Hebrew by the Theatre Department of Tel Aviv University to raise awareness about violence against women and discuss the connections between political and domestic violence. Fornes was in attendance at the performance and workshop. This event was part of a three-day conference sponsored by the departments of Art, Law, Humanities, Women and Gender Studies called "Common

Threads: Interactions of the Arts, Law, and Society in Addressing Violence Against Women.”⁶ The performance was a production of the University of Haifa’s Theatre Department, who performed the show in four different venues in both Haifa and Tel Aviv over the course of six months. The conference was their final tour destination.

Addressing Issues of Identity and Conflict in Palestinian Theatre

In Palestinian culture, home and identity are constantly contested because Israel lays claim to the land through military occupation, and most Palestinians have fled from the area to live as refugees in Lebanon and other parts of the Arab world. The Israeli government validates its claims to Palestine through historical records. The Palestinians no longer have a centralized government and many of their records have been destroyed over the course of nearly sixty years of military occupation. Theatre has become one way for Palestinians to keep their cultural history alive, strengthen cultural identity, and cultivate international support through new methods of ancient oral traditions of storytelling. According to Nassar (2006), theatre has been a part of Palestinian city life since the 1850s, and political consciousness arose in Palestinian theatre productions in response to the influx of European Jewish immigrants as early as the 1930s (p. 17). But after the beginning of the military occupation in 1948, Palestinian theatre activities stopped. They were revived in 1977 by a professional troupe of Palestinian performers the Hakawati, who revived the traditional storytelling tradition found throughout Arab culture in mosque courtyards and cafés. Nassar explains:

By creating the nucleus of a fully professional troupe and generating an authentic Palestinian national theatre, the group would strengthen the roots of theatre, attract audiences, and address the burdensome realities of occupation. (p. 18)

⁶ “Common Threads: Interactions of the Arts, Law, and Society in Addressing Violence Against Women.” conference Web site: <http://www.tau.ac.il/~projects/CONFERENCES/press.html>

With support from local and foreign donations, over the course of 1983 through 1993 the Hakawati leased and converted an old movie theatre in East Jerusalem into the first Palestinian theatre in occupied territory. The Hakawati's first performance in their new space in 1985 was so popular that it toured Europe, Japan and the United States (p.19). But in 1987 Israel placed restrictions on Palestinian travel and movement due to the outbreak of the intifada.⁷ Despite a rise in theatre activities in Jerusalem during the early '90s, other occupied territories couldn't access the work because the Israeli Defense Force cut off the Gaza Strip and West bank from Jerusalem with checkpoints and roadblocks (which are still in place today).

In 1993, the Oslo Peace Accord brought an end to the first intifada and a resurgence of theatre activities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from groups that were active in the '70s and '80s, including a theatre program for schoolchildren in Ramallah (p.19). But this most recent resurgence in theatre is quite different from the past. Nassar explains:

...Palestinian theatre practitioners are trying to survive with a barely functioning local infrastructure and political authority as well as struggling with military occupation. Storytelling... has emerged as the dominant theatrical form for articulating national identity and political aspirations. The onstage storyteller asks hard questions and criticizes current responses to the political situation while using collective memory as a political tool (p.22).

While storytellers in the rest of the Arab world are usually men, the Palestinian storytelling role is primarily performed by women. In contemporary Palestinian culture women are considered the symbol of Palestine itself, and women's status has risen because of the political struggle (p. 23). Women are at the heart of the

⁷ The Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which began in 1987.

Palestinian struggle against cultural annihilation through the stories they tell in their families and communities. Palestinian theatre is a reflection of that important social role.

Samia Qazmouz Bakri's monodrama, *The Alley* (2003), is an emotionally provocative patchwork of stories about Palestinian culture and history. A single character, The Actress, speaks from multiple points of view. The play is written to take place in any public space, the only requirement is that there are chairs for people to sit on and wall space to display pre-occupation photos of the city of Akka,⁸ a seaport in Northern Palestine about 95 miles outside of Jerusalem. This city was Bakri's home as a child and in the play she "returns there to remind her listeners of important events, places and people who left their impact on the inhabitants of Akka (Nassar, 26)."

The Actress in the play draws the spectator/reader in through detailed narratives that take place in Akka before the occupation. Throughout the play these richly detailed scenes from the past are interrupted and juxtaposed with stories about the destruction of Akka's streets and buildings, the dislocation of families and deaths of community members. The structure of the play, with its carefully timed moments of chaos, creates a visceral sense of the loss, dislocation and anger that Palestinian people face in their struggle against cultural annihilation.

Bakri describes specific streets, buildings, people and events in the history of Akka. The details of these memories appeal to the reader/spectator's senses. For example, Bakri describes a the square where the first Palestinian theatre was located:

Coming from the west, just before the lighthouse, near the window in

⁸ English translation of the Arabic name of the ancient city of Acre.

the wall in that small square, there was a coffeehouse called the Casino—The Glass Coffeehouse. The whole front was glass, and it looked out over the sea. And there by the winking light of that lighthouse beyond the waves of the sea, singers would sing... Akka loved art and artists then. All the performers, all of them, came to Akka... They all performed at that theatre. Farid al-Atrash came to Akka in his open convertible Parker car. We ran toward him. He had Kariokka with him—a beautiful, dark-haired woman. He sang: “Oh, if I were a bird, flying around you.” ... We were young then. (p.85)

The stories are presented in a way that evokes the sights, smells and collective cultural meaning surrounding the buildings and the events that take place in and around them. Then a sudden juxtaposition causes the spectator/reader to deal with the story on a completely different intellectual and emotional level of loss, “The cinema isn’t there now. Its velvet curtains were this thick. (*She indicates the width with her hands.*) The latticework balconies, arabesques—they tore them down and built the Israeli National Bank there” (p. 85).

At first the spectator/reader is caught up in the sensory rush, but later a sense of permanence is reinforced in the narrative through the specificity of these details that resist disruption. For example, the area where the inn is located is described as a world of “people from all over God’s wide country, a world of give and take” (p. 83). This suggests openness toward other cultures and reciprocity in social and business interactions. In the story about the “pageant of boyhood” that takes place in the inn, a mare decorated with bells tied around her neck with a blue satin ribbon carries the newly circumcised boy throughout the alleys of Akka. The boy wears a blue satin kaftan with white shoes, and there are “men in baggy pants and fezzes walking on ahead, and the women ululating and singing behind them...” (p. 84). This passage in the play comes to life through very specific sounds, textures, colors and motion.

During the celebration of the Prophet's birthday the inn was elaborately decorated with "colored silk from ceiling to floor" (p .84). People gathered from neighboring villages to celebrate with drumming, and to watch fire-eating magicians and gypsies with performing monkeys. This carnivalesque scene takes place around the same round pool where the procession following the circumcision began with a drumbeat (p.83). But the celebratory context of the inn is broken when shots are fired and Ahmad al-Shuqayri (the first leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization) tells the celebrants to save the gunfire for when it is needed (p. 84). This part of the story shocks the reader/spectator because it places the occupation in the lush, peaceful, site of the inn.

The stories that take place in the Pasha's Bathhouse begin with The Actress impersonating a Jewish tour guide. She explains that the bathhouse was made into a museum in the late 1950s by the Israeli government. One can argue that a museum is a site for preserving material culture, but in this case the museum forcibly occupies the sacred space of a living culture. Humor is used to heighten the sad irony of Israel's claim to Palestinian historical sites, and further illustrates the levels of loss, destruction and displacement that the Palestinian people face under occupation:

The Actress: Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the bathhouse has now been converted into a museum. In the late 1950s that was, some time after the proclamation of the state of Israel. A quite lovely building, architecturally speaking. ...Yes. (*She smiles.*) Here the Pasha would come with his harem, would sit in the middle, with the harem around him, massaging him. But I won't tell you the way the sultans lived. You know all about that. ...But I should add that, in recent years, in the course of excavations carried out under this building, we've discovered remains from the Second Temple period. Yes. (*She concludes, still in Hebrew.*) Yes, "in every wedding they have a share," as the saying goes. (p.86)

The Actress continues to construct her story of the bathhouse from multiple

perspectives that describe the cultural traditions of Palestinian women. The ordinary routine of taking a bath is a collective ritual in the Pasha's bathhouse where "bath day lasts from morning till sunset..." (p. 87). Women laugh and talk about their husbands while washing each other and their children. The steamy air of the bathhouse is filled with the smell of perfumed soap and food that the women would prepare in advance and eat while bathing. The ritual bathing of brides on their wedding day is described in detail in this story and adds a heightened sense of excitement and collectivity to the bathhouse.

Water is a common element throughout the stories of *The Alley*. Up until the story of the bathhouse it is used as a metaphor for abundance and loss. It symbolizes the resilience of the Palestinian people because water can pass from ice, to fluid, to steam, constantly reconstituting itself. Water in all of its forms is used in the story of the bathhouse, from a transparent curtain of steam, to chips of ice that float on rosewater drinks:

...And the moment you set foot on the threshold the scents of the bathhouse would start to reach you—those scents are something I'll never forget. I'd hardly be able to see the women's naked bodies behind all the steam; it was like a transparent curtain. And then the smell would come: the scent of the perfumed soap they brought back from pilgrimage...(p.86)

...Some of the families used Egyptian dancers for the bride's night and bath. Some actually brought them up from Egypt, and [they] would take over the bathhouse completely. The groom's relatives would hand around rosewater drinks from big pots. They'd added lemons strained through spotless muslin. (*She uses her shawl as a strainer.*) They'd break pieces of ice to float on top, then ladle the drink into silver-chased glasses and serve it. Such refinement! (p. 89)

At the end of the play The Actress enacts a scene between herself and an old woman on the beach. The symbol of water is used here again to represent the role of women as storytellers, loss, change and regeneration.

...Um Salim walked off, leaving her story's echo behind her. And I

gazed after her until she was out of sight. Her footsteps I saw, were marked deep in the sand. But soon a wave came and washed them away. (*She makes a movement, as though erasing a footprint.*) It was as though she had never been there. And so many other things had been blotted out too. I went back to the sea—which is all I have left. (*She returns to the place from which she made her original entrance.*) Welcome, welcome a hundred times. You've honored me with your presence here. Welcome, a hundred times. (p.113)

The Actress' final lines of welcome are the opening lines of the play, suggesting that the stories she tells are enduring, the storytelling tradition is an ongoing part of Palestinian life, and that the theatrical form is not going to allow the culture to die. This play may appear simple at first glance because of the solo performer and the setting of the play. But it is actually a very complex, multi-layered narrative that is highly effective in communicating the Palestinian experience and in advocating for the Palestinian cause. There is a fierce attention to sensory detail and historic events that produces an intense emotional response and sense of place—even to someone outside Palestinian culture and experience. The power of this monodrama is in its ability to preserve cultural heritage and identity through storytelling in an extremely vulnerable political environment of extended military occupation forced migration.

Opening Up Possibilities for Change Through the Performing Body in African-American Womanist Theatre

As previously noted in Bartky's discussion, women's bodies are subjected to rigorous standards of physical beauty, fashion, grooming and deportment. An African-American woman is subjected to these same standards of normalization in addition to racialized stereotyping in regard to physical features such as her hair, lips and derrière.

As Hobson (2003) explains, through the history of enslavement and ethnographic exhibition the black female body has been labeled grotesque, strange,

unfeminine and either asexual or hypersexual (p. 87). Between the 16th and 18th century European travel narratives depicted African women's bodies as "mythic and monstrous," which supported popular views that African people were uncivilized and thus, perfect targets for colonization and the slave trade (p.95). The most famous African woman in Europe was Saartjie Baartman, a South African woman who was first displayed in London in 1816 as the "Hottentot Venus" by Dutch exhibitor Hendrik Cezar (p. 99). Exhibitions like this were very popular forms of "freak shows" in Europe. Baartman and many Hottentot Venuses who were exhibited after she died were treated like animals and placed naked in cages where onlookers and scientists could examine their bodies, hair and genitalia. The primary physical feature that both fascinated and repulsed onlookers were Baartman's buttocks, which came to be satirized and exaggerated in cartoons and films (p. 90).

After her death in Paris in 1817 at the age of 25, Baartmann's body was dissected and her buttocks, genitalia, and brain were preserved in jars of formaldehyde and exhibited along with her skeleton at Musée de l'Homme in Paris.⁹ These exhibitions supported the pseudo-scientific framing of race in terms of physical differences that were labeled grotesque or abnormal in comparison to the normalized ideals of the white male and female body, and particularly the racial stereotyping of the African female body. Many of these stereotypes still frame standards of beauty and acceptance in both African-American and white culture for African-American women today.

In the introduction to Shange's (1997) choreopoem *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*, the playwright describes her process

⁹ Baartman's body parts were on display until the early 1980s, and have since been returned to South Africa for a proper burial (p.92).

of accepting her body through training in African dance:

With the acceptance of the ethnicity of my thighs and backside, came a clearer understanding of my voice as a woman & as a poet. The freedom to move in space, to demand of my own sweat a perfection that could continually be approached, though never known, waz poem to me, my body & mind ellipsing, probably for the first time in my life... everything African, everything halfway colloquial, a grimace, a strut, an arched back over a yawn, waz mine. I moved what waz my unconscious knowledge of being in a colored woman's body to my known everydayness. (p.xi)

Shange's choreopoem is a collection of stories that are based on the lived experiences of the seven female characters in the performance. Music and dance unite the women physically in space and provide a backdrop for the dialogue that explores issues from multiple perspectives. The characters tell their stories in overlapping narratives with no clear boundary between one story and another. But while the performance presents juxtaposed positions, the weaving together of stories, actions and bodies heightens the impact of each character's experience.

In addition to working against racialized stereotypes of African-American women, *for colored girls...* articulates the political and social discord that African-American women in the 1970s faced when struggling to define themselves as artists during the emergence of black and feminist consciousness. As Mullen explains:

Black women writers in the 1970s, Morrison, Walker, Bambara, Jones and Shange, clearly were aware of feminist theory... combining feminism, black cultural consciousness, and artistic production with domesticity was particularly challenging for black women artists of the 1970s. Alice Walker's widely read essay "One Child of One's Own" called attention to the dilemma of the feminist artist, yet her coinage of a new word, "womanist," indicates a need to distinguish the black woman's struggle for liberation from that of the white feminist. (p. 224)

Shange faced clashes with black nationalists over issues of sexuality, reproductive rights and her depictions of sexism in relationships between black men and women in *for colored girls....* (Mullen, p .205) Every scene in the choreopoem articulates this

difficult position, but two scenes in particular capture the music, dance, physicality and performative structure of these tensions.

The scene *graduation night* begins with three of the characters dancing the pony, the swim and the nosedive to Martha Reeve's and the Vandella's "Dancing in the Street," while the four other characters dance in place. The lady in yellow speaks and dances the story of her graduation night:

it waz graduation night and i waz the only virgin in the crowd...
 all the prettiest niggers in this factory town
 carried me out wit em
 in a deep black buick
 smellin of thunderbird & ladies in heat
 we rambled from camden to mount holly
 laughin at the afternoon's speeches...
 ...i got drunk & cdnt figure out
 whose hand waz on my thigh / but it didn't matter
 cuz these cousins martin eddie sammy jerome & bobby
 waz my sweethearts alternately since the seventh grade
 & everybody knew i always started cryin if somebody actually
 tried to take advantage of me...

The Dells singing "Stay" is heard

...we danced nasty ol tricks

The lady in yellow sings along with the Dells for a moment. The lady in orange and the lady in blue jump up and parody the lady in yellow and the Dells. The lady in yellow stares at them. They sit down.

doin nasty ol tricks i'd been thinkin since may
 cuz graduation night had to be hot...

...bobby whispered i shd go wit him...
 we teetered silently thru the parkin lot...
 bobby started lookin at me
 yeah
 he started lookin at me real strange
 like i waz a woman or somethin /
 started talkin real soft
 in the backseat of that ol buick
 WOW
 by daybreak
 i just cdnt stop grinnin... (p.7-10)

At the end of the scene all of the ladies join in singing along to "Stay" with the lady in yellow, but the lady in blue confronts the lady in yellow about losing her virginity

in the backseat of a car, and says she never liked dancing the grind (p. 11). Two scenes later, a dramatic change occurs in the lighting, and all of the actors react as if they have been hit in the face. The lady in blue begins the scene *latent rapists*, which addresses the issue of having sex with male friends from a very different perspective from the playful rite of passage in *graduation night*:

lady in blue
a friend is hard to press charges against

lady in red
if you know him
you must have wanted it...
... a rapist is always to be a stranger
to be legitimate
someone you never saw
a man wit obvious problems...

lady in blue
pressin charges will be as hard
as keepin yr legs closed
while five fools try to run a train on you

lady in red
these men friends of ours
who smile nice
stay employed
and take us out to dinner

lady in purple
lock the door behind you

lady in blue
wit fist in face
to fuck...

lady in red
...cuz it turns out the nature of rape has changed

lady in blue
we can now meet them in circles we frequent for companionship

lady in red
... we cd even have em over for dinner
& get raped in our own houses
by invitation
a friend (p. 17-19)

This confrontation with acquaintance rape was very bold for African-American

female performers in the 1970s especially since this part of the play implicates black men, who were and are racially targeted as rapists. But this kind of confrontation is what makes *for colored girls...* one of the seminal pieces of resistance theatre by African-American women. And the piece continues to be performed because the issues it deals with are still important to all women. As Hobson notes, "...in African-American womanist performance each performer defines herself through dialogue and dance that reclaims the power of communal affirmation of the body beautiful (p.102)." This communal affirmation now includes women of color from various mixed ancestry as performers in the piece and mixed audiences of men and women from a wide range of backgrounds.

Section IV: Summary and Discussion

What can a socio-historical and textual analysis of specific pieces of theatre of resistance add to this framework for empowerment?

This study has offered perspectives on addressing the question above through an examination of elements of theatre of resistance by applying theory and/or providing historical context for the textual analyses of specific plays. First, Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* has been used to illustrate the capacity of theatre of resistance to critique mainstream dialogues. Second, an analysis of Fornes' *The Conduct of Life* illustrates how theatre of resistance questions notions of the privileged male speaking subject and gives voice to silenced stories. Third, Bakri's monodrama *The Alley* is an example of how theatre of resistance can be used to preserve cultural history and identity. And finally, an analysis of Shange's choreopoem *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* has been used to illustrate theatre of resistance's potential to reenact lived

experiences from multiple perspectives and offer space for public recognition of those experiences. Each of these analyses addresses specific social issues, therefore, what do these disparate views on theatre add to my analysis of empowerment?

It is important to recognize that regardless of the content or context of these examples of theatre of resistance, each works' capacity to encourage resistance and empowerment is dependent upon the community they are enacted in and by. But community is an ambiguous term that needs further clarification, especially in terms of the plays discussed in this study. ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theatres South) define community in three ways: communities of location are neighborhoods or towns; communities of spirit convene around beliefs or values such as religion, sexual orientation, or pop-culture followings like Trekkies; communities of tradition are constituted around shared activities and maintained over time through activities such as fraternal organizations and groups based on ethnic heritage (Geer, 1998, p.xxviii).

The capacity for each of the plays analyzed in this study to encourage social resistance and empowerment is dependent upon the community a given performance is enacted in. For example, a performance of Bakri's *The Alley* by a Palestinian actress in an occupied territory offers very different forms of resistance and empowerment from a performance in a Palestinian refugee camp or Arab diasporas community. Performances of this monodrama in an occupied territory would take place in a community of location, spirit and tradition in relation to the content of the play, as an act of resistance among the destruction and violence that continually threatens the cultural traditions and history that the play enacts. It is a reminder of why audience members stay in occupied territories and continue to fight to protect their homeland, strengthening the cultural and political identities of the audience

members.

Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* has been produced in recent years on college campuses across the country—from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Dowe, 1999) to Colby College¹⁰ in Maine—and was first performed by a multiracial cast by Penumbra Theatre Company of Saint Paul, Minnesota in 1999 (Lee, 1999, p. 455). Portland's Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center's 2005 production of Shange's play¹¹ was a reader's theatre project performed by women in the center's storyteller's reading literacy program for community members (Morse, 2004). Once again, depending on the purpose of the performance, this piece could be used to invigorate communities of every type.

Through this study I have presented a paradigm for theatres of resistance that can be used to analyze the constitution of power and to critique power relations, which are necessary steps in understanding the nature of empowerment. According to Foucault, and feminist interpretations of his work, power is not something relegated to the dominant class that preserves and wields its influence on others in order to secure authority. Instead, power is a complex system of minute social interactions which are constructed, enacted and transmitted through the institutions, social structures, and mainstream discourses, that shape the physical and psychological conditions of each person's life (Foucault, 1984; Butler, 1997; Sawicki, 1996; Bartky, 1990). The norms and standards that we each are judged by, and which we internalize, become a means of social control that keep us docile and

¹⁰ Press Release October 4, 2002. *Shange's for colored girls who have considered suicide... at Colby October 17-19*: Colby College Web site: <http://www.colby.edu/news/detail/283/>

¹¹ Portland theatre openings archive, March 16, 2005. portlandtheatre.com Web site: <http://www.portlandtheatre.com/?p=56>

hesitant to question the authority that seems so far removed from everyday life. Our physical and psychological lives are shaped by institutional values, but a critical awareness of the ways in which one is affected by institutions of power and the norms that they produce is the first step in resisting them incrementally on a personal, organizational, community or national scale.

Developing a critical awareness is essential when approaching theatre as a means of resistance or empowerment. The four elements that make space for resistance and empowerment in theatre projects either rely on or foster critical awareness. These elements of theatre of resistance are very similar to stages in the process of empowerment. For example, the process of empowerment begins with recognition of one's relation to power and the critical analysis of the standards that are imposed on one's life from the outside (Foucault, 1984; Butler, 1997). This can be compared to the ways in which theatres of resistance critique mainstream dialogues and confront oppression. Another important part of the process of empowerment is a dialectic view of the world and one's place in it, where an individual questions what is taken for granted and becomes empowered to speak and act on her or his own behalf. This can be compared to the ways in which theatre of resistance raises consciousness through presenting multiple perspectives on social issues in a process that gives voice to viewpoints that are often silenced.

As I stated in the beginning of this paper, empowerment is a frequently used but ambiguous term. This study offers no clear-cut strategy for empowering individuals through theatre of resistance because empowerment is an internal process that can only be supported—not imposed—by external factors. What is certain is that theatre of resistance fosters a powerful means to question one's conditions in life—critical awareness. Critical awareness that surfaces in theatre of

resistance is difficult to measure in terms of outcomes. But the stories, discussions, actions and emotions that emerge in these experiences in theatre are immeasurably important as both a form of expression and a tool for social change.

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