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(Between the Streets) In Worcester : Redefining Professional Education in Community Development to Cultivate Empathy Through a Community Theatrical Framework

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(Between the Streets) In Worcester : Redefining Professional Education in Community
Development to Cultivate Empathy through a Community Theatrical Framework

Chiu Yi Hannah Yukon

May 2016

A Research Paper

Submitted to the faculty of Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the department
of International Development, Community, and Environment

And accepted on the recommendation of

Laurie Ross, Ph.D., Chief Instructor

Abstract

Redefining Professional Education in Community Development to Cultivate Empathy
through a Community Theatrical Framework

Chiu Yi Hannah Yukon

This research paper presents an alternative form of conducting Community Development Research. It highlights the gaps that currently exist in professional education with the community development and planning program at Clark University. The research paper employs a theatrical framework to encourage practitioners to ask more illuminating questions that informs the ‘human work’ that sometimes gets overlooked. In order to be authentic in the field of Community Development, practitioners need to be in touch with a less scientifically rational side of themselves, to truly embrace the complexities of the human condition. Drawing from my personal experiences, I wrote a play based on my field observations, conversations and interactions that I’ve had during my time in the program. This will hopefully provide both students and practitioners an alternative way to see their world and their encounters with people around them. By engaging with a theatrical framework, it is my hope that both students and practitioners also discover new ways of conducting research, and new ways of being, both inside and outside the classroom.

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Introduction

The act of studying and practicing Community Development is as complex as the very nature of the act of living and being part of society. Studying a field that takes into account a plethora of economic, social, environmental, and political attributes brings about many contentious ideologies that work together and against each other simultaneously. It also brings into account the spiritual and philosophical elements of humanity that are often removed from the discourse completely as it fails to coincide with normative hegemonic ideas of academia and ‘hard data’ as a means of justification for community development practice. As practitioners, these nebulous elements are hard to define let alone capture in both quantitative and qualitative data analyses. Hence, through my personal experiences with community members, city government, and individuals, I hope to illuminate these ‘nebulous’ ideas of humanity and how theatre can play an important role in helping us understand the field of Community Development and the different ways that it can be taught and learned. This is this understanding that is so crucial to the human work that is done in the field of Community Development. And it is this ‘understanding’ that extends itself into the realm of compassion, love, and empathy that is often absent in traditional and even alternative forms of professional education. Ultimately, theatre will show us how to decrease the distance of shared human experience, and how to increase the connectedness of our lives. Simultaneously, it will provide a different framework for practitioners and how they carry out their work in their various fields, as well as how they teach Community Development in higher learning institutions.

Beyond the field of Community Development, higher learning institutions in general

(as much as we speak of, and enjoy speaking of this idea of “intersectionality”) we have somehow found ourselves in geographic and philosophical isolation from each other; from the ideas and work that is generated. This idea of technical and scientific rationality, while important and necessary aspects of knowledge and epistemology, have become the forefront and valued above other ways of knowing and learning. Historically, the idea of “technical rationality [as] an epistemology of practice derived from positivist philosophy has been woven into the fabric of higher learning institutions” (Schön, 3). However, along the way we have lost the integration of fields of study unless one chooses to major in multiple areas, or if one decides to self design their own major where it is treated as “interdisciplinary” (Schön, 310). Beyond having to take one class that extends our comprehension of our world, we are not actively encouraged to explore contradistinctive methods to learning or conducting research. Instead, we are taught to acquire an abundant amount of knowledge that pertains *specifically* to that one area of expertise while offering very little leeway with alternative forms of learning and expression. Geographically, we are confined to our departments on campus which affects the spaces that we inhabit and frequent. We are broken up into “territorial units” where “each field of subject matter is the province of a department, and within each department, knowledge is further subdivided into courses” (Schön, 309.) Philosophically, we are segregated by specialization and our various fields of expertise. This is how we become distant with and from each other. Consequentially, our thoughts risk becoming insipid and innocuous. Pedagogy becomes synonymous with repetition and specialization. We have lost the curiosity of those who study different things, we find them ‘unnecessary’ because we learn that if it does not directly pertain to our area of expertise, it

is somehow frivolous. Indeed, we are the byproducts of “the prevailing idea of rigorous professional knowledge based on technical rationality” and this idea has unfortunately become the quintessential characteristic of professional education (Schön, 3). We start to learn more and more about less and less. When we indulge in the “hierarchy of knowledge” where “the greater one’s proximity to basic science, as a rule, the higher one’s academic status”, we inherently place more value on certain types of knowing over others (Schön, 9). This creates tension within fields of discipline, practitioners, students, professors, and all the characters who come into contact with those who presumably think they “know” more than the other. Knowing in this instance is not what is being critiqued. We all have inherent knowledge that we have acquired through lived experiences, isolated reflection, social reflection, stories that we have heard and learned from, scientific expertise and rationality. We all possess more than one form of knowing. However, what becomes problematic is when we decide and impose that one way of knowing is ‘better’ or the ‘ultimate’ form of knowing. For example, most of us know not to put our fingers into an electrical socket. Some of us know this because our parents have warned us of the consequences. Some of us know this from watching cartoons where we witness the sophomoric character lose a tail from injecting a pair of metal pliers into a socket hoping to conduct heat. Some of know this because we understand the scientific functionality of the human body and its proclivity to conducting electricity based on its high water content. Some of us can even delve into the explanation of bioelectricity to offer a more scientific reasoning as to why we should not put metal objects into electrical outlets. Regardless, it seems that knowing not to do this would be classified as ‘common sense’. However, “according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety

commission, each year approximately 4,000 people find themselves in the emergency room seeking treatment for injuries caused by accidents involving electrical outlets” (Neer, 2). Apparently, not everyone knows not to put their finger into an electric socket, and according to my mother “ignorance is not your privilege, it is your misfortune” (Agnes Yukon). Indeed, being ignorant is unfortunate. However, in our society we have somehow placed a value statement on those who do know and even more of an implicit judgment on *how* they have acquired that knowledge; i.e., Eurocentric professional education

In this instance, I offer an alternative paradigm that offers a new way of learning and practicing what we learn in the field of Community Development. (This alternative extends beyond the field of Community Development, but for the sake of this Master’s Paper and for those who read it, I will have to state and restate that this form will help practitioners in this field understand and hopefully teach and accept different ideas of how practice and research are conducted). To support my findings, I will cite no statistics, (something I was *told I would have to do.*) and instead rely on the power of creativity, curiosity, and awareness. However, before I delve into the realm of theatre and how it can make us better practitioners in the field of Community Development, I will look at traditional and alternative forms of practicing and learning about this field.

Literature Review

Traditional Forms of Professional Education

In the field of Community Development (and also possibly beyond), higher learning institutions have developed a method of teaching that is clocked in hard skills and technical knowledge. Knowledge is ‘transferred’ through theoretical and analytical information in the form of pre-designed academic curriculum appropriate readings which are then discussed in class. Professional educators are tested on ‘how well they know something’ on paper, always ‘in theory’ and their expertise tested in these artificial hypothetical scenarios. E.g: As a practitioner in this field, how would you use this academic knowledge to do XYZ. The technical scope of Community Development also teaches us how to be or work in non-profits. Traditional education teaches us the mechanisms of *how* to do something. Traditional professional education is rooted in our general trust that institutions know what they are doing, that they know what to teach, the type of knowledge that is needed in the industry, and the means of attaining this knowledge. For the majority of the time, we don’t question this. But I think that questioning what is camouflaged as ‘truth’ is worth doing from time to time.

Critiques of Professional Development in Community Development

While some problems require the technical knowledge that traditional education seeks to teach us, a lot of the problems still exist in that ‘murky place’. Traditional ways of teaching Community Development still follows Eurocentric ideas of education. These

include rote learning and a “focus on ideas and achievements of Western cultures” (Thibert). Apart from the rhetoric about ‘old White men’ whose ideas are heavily embedded within the veins of curriculum, there is an inevitable connection to class and the social standing of those who’s ideas are learned about. Patricia Hill Collins actively critiques this by stating that,

What people know and think are intrinsically wrapped up with class position. Also notice that the elite in any society exercise disproportionate control over what ideas are accepted as truth. Thus, whatever else philosophy may say, sociologically we know that knowledge is influenced by and used in the politics surrounding class position” (Collins, *Intersecting Oppressions*, 2).

This is also wrapped around scientific rationality and the ways in which curriculum have been developed which affects how things are taught and to whom that knowledge is passed on to. Community Development is just another area of study and expertise that has been ‘Euro-fide’. As a result, the type of knowledge that is generated among professional educators is repeated and stored and passed on like a baton instead of encouraging students to debate and discuss them. While there is the verbal component that is encouraged in institutions of higher learning, it still only “gives the student formulas to receive and store” without offering the means for “authentic thought” (Freire, 38). This traditional method of conducting Community Development “still embodies that idea that practical competence becomes professional when its instrumental problem solving is grounded in systematic, preferably scientific knowledge” (Schön, 8). When I was told by a Professor at Clark who taught the Masters Research Seminar course that I ‘had to’ include statistics in this paper, because it was ‘unavoidable’, I had a visceral reaction to the professor and refused to believe that including statistics in the Master’s Paper was the only way to conduct research. After consulting and lamenting to another professor in the education department, I found that there

were indeed alternate forms of conducting research and other ways to write academic papers. I was also unconvinced of the professor's expertise and felt remarkably alienated from the class and the readings that were assigned. It felt absurd. It felt one-dimensional and foreign, as if stepping into class was itself a form of surrender to the institution. And then I thought to myself, "if this is the work that we're trying to do in the community, and it already feels misanthropic and strangely unaware of itself, how are we supposed to actively engage in a *human* way with the communities that we're supposed to be working with or 'helping'?" I realized that by following strict methodological rules, "scientists aim to distance themselves from the values, vested interest, and emotions generated by their class, race, sex, or unique situation" (Collins, 205). We were reminded to stay neutral as if by decontextualizing ourselves, we can become "detached observers", and "manipulators of nature" (Ibid). In a strange way, we were encouraged to "remove the objects of study from their contexts" rendering the "separation of information from meaning" (Collins, 206). I was quickly disinterested and defiant. Reading Black Feminist Thought gave me the language to express my frustration. I learned the danger of how "positivist approaches [to academia] aim to create scientific descriptions of reality by producing objective generalizations" and in turn, how positivist teaching jeopardizes the student's sense of self and agency (Collins, 205). The impact that positivist thinking has on Community Development is that it teaches us, very quickly from the beginning, that there is a 'method' to things, to the lives that we lead, to the interactions that we have with our classmates, our teachers and mentors, our communities. It teaches us that unless things are 'backed up' or 'proven with objective data', that stories and words and narratives don't have as much power. Traditional methods of

professional education in the field of Community Development alienates the practitioner from the very essence of the work. It teaches the practitioner that achieving objectivity is the heart of what we do. But how feasible is it to expect one to be just as objective in the classroom as when they are interacting with real human lives outside of the institution? Why are we being taught to accept only a handful of procedures used to collect data when the actual lived experiences of an individual and community is so varied, so complex, so nuanced? What aspects of our learning about Community Development is omitted when traditional education is the only way that we are being taught?

When we fall into the realm of Eurocentric professional education where “professional competence consists in the application of theories and techniques derived from systematic, preferably scientific research to the solution of the instrumental problems of the practice”, we fail to see that alternative forms of information could be another piece of the puzzle (Schön, 33). Like the professor who told me I ‘had to’ include hard data in my Master’s paper. She was following the rules that she was taught. She was leading by example. She embodied the traditional view of professional knowledge “as privileged information or expertise” (Schön, 309). This is the danger of professional education unexamined. When I spoke to her about my Master’s Paper, and tried explaining my play, she insisted that I still needed to have ‘statistics’ and ‘hard data’. At this point, I told her that I would send her my play with hopes that she would understand my perspective. Two weeks after our final presentation for the class I asked if she had read my play hoping to be able to speak to her about what she thought, she informed me that she had not read it. This was the

final class. Unfortunately, I was not surprised.

It is therefore important that practitioners in the field of Community Development need to be open to alternate ways of knowing and alternate ways of expressing knowledge to avoid alienating not only their students, but the work itself. The type of work that is called for in this field also requires an understanding of the interconnectedness of our universe, a spiritual component that is often regarded as ‘fluffy’ or not grounded in empirical research and therefore unreliable. The work that practitioners conduct in this field goes beyond a neighborhood, or a community, or a school. To do the type of work that we do, we must be in touch with aspects of ourselves and the idea of ‘the self’ in relation to society, to the world, and to the universe.

Alternate forms of Professional Education and Teaching

In an attempt to make up for the limiting ways that traditional education has cast forth, we find comfort in knowing that there lie alternative forms of education in the field of Community Development. Alternate forms of professional education include practicum and evaluation classes where students are asked to put their knowledge to use. Theoretical frameworks are coupled with hands on experience in the form of a project that lasts the duration of a semester. Alternative forms of professional education help connect the dots of what we learn in books to what goes on outside them. It is the experience that teaches us to be better practitioners. After all, it was philosopher John Dewey, who said that “all genuine education comes about through experience” (Dewey,13). But he also said that that “does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (Ibid).

According to Schön,

A practicum is a setting designed for the task of learning a practice. In a context that approximates a practice world, students learn by doing. Although their doing usually falls short of real-world work. They learn by undertaking projects that simulate and simplify practice; or they take on real-world projects under close supervision. The practicum is a virtual world, relatively free of the pressures, distractions, and risks of the real one, to which, nevertheless, it refers (Schön, 37).

The study of Community Development requires interaction, experience, and a political framework to understand that communities do not exist simply as an idea but instead are made up of people and systems of power. As we learn about the intricacies of the social inequities that surround us, we have to unlearn the ways that we thought we could help. This is the hardest part because it challenges us on the most instinctual level. We start to notice how connected everything is. We learn this by doing.

Karl Mannheim said

“...In a society in which the main changes are to be brought about through collective deliberation, and in which re-evaluations should be based upon intellectual insight and consent, a completely new system of education would be necessary, one which would focus its main energies on the development of our intellectual powers and bring about a frame of mind which can bear the burden of skepticism and which does not panic when many of the thought habits are doomed to vanish” (Mannheim, 23).

It seems that unlike traditional ways of learning and doing Community work, the practicum offers a ‘hands on’ approach to the field that is rarely found in mainstream

theoretical classrooms. From personal experience after taking the practicum class at Clark University, I learned that the most important thing is not only being able to apply and transform theoretical knowledge into action, but also the ability to be selective with procedures and methodologies. For example, we might learn that there are certain protocols that should be followed when conducting personal interviews, but how do we know *not* to follow them when we're in a certain situation that would make us appear insensitive or mechanical should we have followed the protocols? While alternate forms of education teaches a different way to conduct community development, students still need other skills to be authentic practitioners in this field.

The “acquisition of artistry as the student’s discovery of the *time* it takes—time to live through the initial shocks of confusion and mystery, unlearn initial expectations, and begin to master the practice of the practicum; time to live through the learning cycles involved in any design like task; and time to shift repeatedly back and forth between reflection on and in action” (Schön, 311). A lot of the aspects of the practicum were learned by simply doing. However, empty action will render meaningless results and as my mother always reminded me, “it is not with practice that one attains perfection, but instead, perfect practice makes perfect” (Agnes Yukon). However, the complexity with Community Development is the nature of work that does not (and should not) call for an exact replica of action and methodology. If this happens, the practicum can easily fall into the category of mindless processes which similar to normative forms, can “distance ourselves from the kinds of performance we need most to understand” (Schön, 13). Any type of “unexamined

epistemology of practice” runs the risk of further distancing the practitioner to the work (Ibid). Instead, institutions need to understand that they need to teach students “how to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty” (Schön, 11). Unfortunately, “this is just what [professional educators] don’t know how to teach” (Ibid). While practicum classes force us to engage with the community and to process the information that we have gained, it still lacks a certain ‘connective’ aspect. It can still run the risk of being product driven. While there are still certain parts of the work that can only be learned by doing, for example, how to conduct an interview or focus group. One will naturally become better at it the more they do it. However, how do we teach theory, empathy and epistemology at the same time? Can we? And why is it important?

According to Daryl Cameron, an assistant professor of psychological and brain sciences at the University of Iowa, we can. In his article in the New York Times, *Empathy Is Actually a Choice*, he states that “empathy is only as limited as we choose it to be” (New York Times, 2010). Roman Krznaric, a founding faculty member of The School of Life in London and empathy advisor to organizations including Oxfam and the United Nations, He states that “The 21st century should become the Age of Empathy, when we discover ourselves not simply through self-reflection, but by becoming interested in the lives of others. We need empathy to create a new kind of revolution. Not an old-fashioned revolution built on new laws, institutions, or policies, but a radical revolution in human relationships.” While alternate forms of professional education moves us towards challenging Eurocentric “traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity [and] meritocracy”,

it still lacks a certain empathetic element that is found in theatre and the process of creating art (Yossa and Solorzano, 26).

Theatre in Professional Education

After looking at traditional and alternate forms of practicing Community Development and the gaps that exist in these forms, I would like to explore the ways in which theatre can provide professional educators a way to increase the connectedness not only in the ways that they teach, but also in the ways that they conduct the work in their various communities. First, I will explain why theatre is an important tool in this field and then present my play, *(Between the Streets) in Worcester* as my findings. This will hopefully allow the reader to understand the context and be able to conceptualize this method of ‘data collection’. It is also my hope that the play acts as a bridge between the theories that are leaned in the classroom, and the reality of what happens outside it.

Theatre as an art form is magical in ways beyond our comprehension. Apart from the performative aspect of theatre that attempts to “offer a photographic reproduction of reality (slice of life)” theatre is also a reflection of society (Cash). This reflective aspect of theatre makes those who are involved just a little more introspective about their world as it reflects the most globally contemporary ideas and events that are occurring onto a stage or an audience to reflect upon. This is also why I chose to write a play to illustrate some of my ideas that I have found to be hard to express in academic language. Some of my ideas span across philosophical and ideological frameworks, of which, I have not yet acquired or discovered the language to express in mainstream vernacular. Another reason why I have

chosen theatre and playwriting as a platform of expression, is because theatre is historically political. Unlike film and television which was born out of a desire to entertain the masses, theatre was created as a form of citizenship and civic engagement. This does not mean that theatre cannot be entertaining. Additionally, I have intentionally drawn from the work and practice of Bertolt Brecht to write this play. Brecht is known worldwide of the creation of “Verfremdungseffekt”, “V-effect”, also known as the Alienation Effect (Willett, Hill and Wang). Brecht was heavily influenced by Marxism and the idea that “man and society could be intellectually analyzed that led him to develop his theory of "epic theatre." Brecht believed that theatre should appeal not to the spectator's feelings but to his reason. While still providing entertainment, it should be strongly didactic and capable of provoking social change” (Brandies). The audience in his view should not be made to feel emotions; it should be made to think. Guided by the historical richness of theatre and the inherent political aspects as an art form, *(Between the Streets) in Worcester* will hopefully give professional educators and students another perspective on being able to identify the gaps that currently exist in the field of Community Development.

Again, historical context is essential in understanding the origins of Brecht’s ideas. The Alienation Effect was used in my play to allow the process of writing something contemporary to still contain its own political dimension. There are certain aspects of Brechtian theatre that I have allowed to intentionally seep its way into my work. The use of music employed and acting technique called “gestus” indicated by the stage directions, draws from Brecht’s idea of alienating the audience by using repetitive motions to remind

them that they are watching a play to avoid any emotional connection to the characters, thus allowing the politics of the play to be understood and thought about. Each scene of a play has its basic Gestus (Grundgestus). The Gestus (the correct stance, movement, and tone of voice) assumes greater importance than the supposed inner life or emotions of these characters. Hence, similarity to Epic Theatre, where the audience members are forced to think about the social conditions that are presented on stage, Community Development could benefit from a creative integration of ideas that allows practitioners to think differently about how they engage with the social dimension of their work. Encouraging a creative aspect into Community Development will give practitioners the necessary space to think critically and form alternative solutions and interventions.

Methodology

The ways in which artists create their work is just as important as the work itself. Being able to document the process allows for a clearer understanding of how the work came into fruition. It also provides the artist and the audience a way to reflect upon the work in order to make meaningful changes and critiques for future developments.

I wrote this play during the summer before my first year in the Community Development and Planning Program, before I even knew that I was going to be attending the program at all. I was working as a gallery curator at the Worcester Pop Up, an initiative created by the City of Worcester, Bay State Savings Bank, and the Cultural Coalition to ‘revitalize the downtown area’. I was brought on to manage artists, create programming, and organize the

art space. This was my first interaction with City government and local artists in Worcester and surrounding cities. This was also my first time spending copious amounts of time in downtown Worcester.

In addition to working at the PopUp, I was also an academic assistant at a summer literacy camp at Worcester State University. Needless to say, I was spending a lot of time with residents and community members in Worcester learning about Worcester's history and the different demographics that occupied different areas in Worcester. This was also where I learned about a kind of injustice and inequity that I never knew about before. I did not have the language to express my observations and the feelings that I had towards the work that was being done in these two very contrasting aspects of Community Development. I did not know that I was already working in this field, and that the work I was doing contributed to a much larger scope of work that was being done in the city. I began to observe how connected everything was. Through speaking to artists at the gallery, I learned about the art scene which was happening in Worcester. I learned about art spaces, and the constant lack of resources that are available for local artists. It was also at the gallery where I was forced to interact with Worcester. The location of the PopUp was right next to City Hall, directly across from the Worcester Common. The Worcester Common is an interesting place to observe. I would often find myself having lunch on one of the benches sharing a space with people I would never speak to. It was a weird space. On one side of the Common you would see city officials walking in and out, in their office suits and ties, brief cases and polished shoes. I could identify them the same way I could identify the people that gathered on the

other side of the Common. Only a few hundred feet away, you would see people taking swings from brown paper bags, gathered in clusters underneath trees and park benches, smoking and standing next to their pets and bicycles, laughing and looking around. It was during my lunch breaks that I started to notice this divide, yet it seemed like both sides lived in harmony with each other. Sure, there were police patrolling the Common on their Segway's and on foot, sometimes coming up to the people on the benches, but for the most part it appeared harmonious. However, after closer examination and observation, I noticed that both groups of people did not go out of their way to interact with the other group of people. It was a mutual understanding of "you do your thing, I'll do mine." But what really captured my attention, and later on inspired me to write this, was the interactions and experiences that I saw and was a part of with *both* groups of people, and how much tension existed between the groups. It was this tension that I gravitated towards, because I could feel something there, but was not able to capture it verbally. I also wasn't sure, (and remain uncertain) if what I felt were my own projections or if there was in fact, a palpable sense of disdain. Regardless, this was when I started recording my observations. They were quick notes that I took while having lunch, or conversations that I overheard, or observations of specific aesthetics that were unique to me. My collection method of dialogue was also erratic and unstructured. This means that I was recording all the time, in notebooks, on my cellular device, on napkins, on the back of my hand; whenever a moment presented itself, I was overcome with an instinct to record it. And it was then I started to notice how interconnected everything was. I learned that Worcester had a tight knit community of artists and residents who knew each other. During these events, I would meet people who knew my old bosses,

friends, lovers, neighbors, and students. It was extremely intimate, yet the intimacy was distant. Everyone seemed to know, or at least, know of, everybody. I started seeing the students who I was teaching walking around downtown and although they knew me, they would choose not to come inside the gallery, or they would, but did not feel comfortable participating in the activities. I noticed the color of the room and the colors of the bodies who entered the gallery space, and how unwelcoming it felt to those who did not feel like they could be a part of a 'Jazz Night' or 'Printmaking' session. It became apparent that for those who lived in Worcester, that art was something foreign and 'not for them'. A part of me knew that this was something that I needed to explore.

By the time I entered the Community Development and Planning Program at Clark University, I already had a certain impression of Worcester that was new and exciting. Getting to learn about Worcester and the experiences that I had over the summer allowed me to embrace the new concepts and theories that we learned about in class. However, my first semester into the program proved to be very different from my experiences that I had outside of the classroom. I noticed the gaps that existed in the classroom through the discussions that we had about poverty, people of color, environmental pollution, policies in governance, and institutional bureaucracy. I slowly acquired the language to name what I was observing yet it was still not enough to capture the lived experiences of what I was a part of only months before. The language felt arbitrary and objectifying, detached from the realities of the lives that I had gotten to know about. I started writing more. I started recording conversations that I had with my roommate. We would stay up really late and talk about race

and cultural identities and how we felt eternally displaced because of where we were born and where we grew up, but also about what we looked like and how we dealt with clashing identities. The conversations that we had lingered hours after and I would go into my room and transcribe them.

Over the summer in 2015, I sat down and collected all my notes, as many as I could find and started writing the play. Initially, I thought that it was going to be extremely difficult and was worried that it might appear schizophrenic and random. However, once I planned out my characters, developed a dramatic arch, and wrote scenes, I found a thread that connected the lives of individuals and situations in a surprisingly coherent fashion. The material however, was self-actualizing and I realized that I had been writing this play for the course of the entire year without fully realizing it. The hip hop influences were gathered through the ESL (English as a Second Language) students who shared their lives, stories, music, culture, and hearts with me. Once I listened to what they were listening to, I found a palpable connection between their lives and what they chose as a means of expression. Rappers like Joey Bada\$\$, Capital Steez, Mos Def, and Flatbush Zombies slowly became part of my summer playlist. These artists gave me the language that I did not have through reading theoretical books in classes. I felt a collaboration between my students, these underground rappers from Brooklyn, and my play slowly transform into something of a larger narrative and commentary about inner-city youth and the poverty and violence that they live in; that we, as Clark students live in as well, yet can often detach or chose to escape from because it is not our reality. Just like how I was able to sit in my car and drive away,

leaving the man with his sign that read, “No job, no home, please help”. Hence, conducting Community Development work from the top down will inherently appear as phony and inauthentic to a community who has to ‘deal’ and live in a reality that they can not escape from. This play aims to address how we can better organize, how we can examine social capital, perhaps even coming up with a different language altogether, a different term to address the inherent humanity within us, to *really* create change in our own worlds, in our own fields of expertise, while addressing and becoming more self- aware every step of the way. As researchers, we bare the responsibility and are accountable to the institutions that we are a part of, as well as to the subjects that we ‘study’ for our academic endeavors. The play looks at how we can do that in a less self-benefitting and more human way.

Findings

(In Between the Streets) of Worcester

Note: The scenes move quickly after each other. Blackouts are only necessary when there is a felt shift in the mood. The lights should travel in a way that reflects the shifting of places and people, transient but permanent.

Characters

MARY
STRANGER/KEVIN
SHEENA
JACK
ROSA
LAYLA
WHITE MAN WITH A PONY TAIL AKA ROSA'S BOSS
CITY OFFICIAL #1
CITY OFFICIAL #2
MAN/BILLY
WOMAN/BIANCA
HERA
JOEY
KEVIN
PROFESSOR
JIM
RAJ

SCENE 1: SPACE IS THE PLACE

(A young gallery attendant, MARY, stands outside an art gallery and smokes her cigarette. The gallery is located in downtown Worcester. Please see attachments for what this means. Some time passes. A stranger walks up to her.)

STRANGER

Yo could I bum a cigarette?

MARY

I don't have one on me but I could roll you one.

STRANGER

Oh. Yeah, yeah, sure okay.

(MARY starts rolling him a cigarette. Pause.)

STRANGER

What're you doing in there?

MARY

I work here.

STRANGER

What is it?

MARY

It's a gallery.

STRANGER

Oh. So like art?

MARY

Yeah. Mostly painting and photography. Some sculptures. Mostly painting.

STRANGER

Oh yeah? Painting huh?

MARY

Yeah.

STRANGER
Aw man that's cool man.

MARY
Yeah it's pretty cool.

(Pause)

STRANGER
You sell anything?

MARY
Not much. We've only been open a couple of weeks, so...

STRANGER
How much these things go for?

MARY
Couple of hundred dollars. Sometimes more.

STRANGER
Nigga *what?*

MARY
Yeah.

STRANGER
You're joking!

MARY
No...I'm...

STRANGER
(extended) Shit...

MARY
Yeah.

STRANGER
Unbelievable.

MARY
Yeah, it's...yeah.

STRANGER

I do art!

MARY

Oh yeah?

STRANGER

Shit yeah, now I do!

MARY

(laughs) What do you do?

(She hands him the cigarette)

STRANGER

(He takes it) Thanks. I uh...you have a lighter?

MARY

Oh yeah.

(she gives him her lighter)

STRANGER

(He lights it and gives it back to her) So yeah, I uh you know, I draw things.

MARY

Oh yeah?

STRANGER

Yeah, I draw things. Sometimes in my head. Sometimes out loud.

MARY

Anything on paper or canvas?

STRANGER

I can't afford that shit.

MARY

So how can I see some work?

STRANGER

Nah, I don't do art. I'm not very good.

MARY

Hmm.

(They stand and smoke in silence)

STRANGER

You like workin' here?

MARY

It's okay. It's quiet. Not many people come in here. I'm just doing this until I can find something more permanent.

STRANGER

Yeah?

MARY

Yeah.

STRANGER

They pay you?

MARY

Yeah but it's—

STRANGER

You get paid to stand around an empty room?

MARY

Well I do more than that—

STRANGER

(laughs) I know I'm just fuckin' with you.

MARY

(laughs)

STRANGER

You live around here?

MARY

Yeah, near by. Do you?

STRANGER

Born and raised.

MARY

You like it here?

STRANGER

Worcester's alright. Winter's tough like, you know.

MARY

Yeah.

STRANGER

Pretty big shit hole really.

MARY

How's that?

STRANGER

You kiddin' me?

MARY

(exhales smoke)

STRANGER

Motherfuckin place. *(He gestures around)* Fuckin niggas all over this town shootin each other like *we're* the fuckin enemy you know. I don't fuckin know, tryna live, you know? Just tryna live.

MARY

Hmm.

STRANGER

And then they go have a place like this?

MARY

What?

STRANGER

This!

MARY

The Gallery?

STRANGER

Hell yeah! You think people are gonna come in here and pay for this shit?

MARY

I don't know. Some do.

STRANGER

Oh yeah? Who?

MARY

People who come in and see something they like.

STRANGER

From Worcester?

MARY

Yeah I think so. *(pause)* Actually I don't know.

STRANGER

Yeah. *(laughs)* No one from Worcester's gonna buy this shit. No offence.

MARY

Well—

STRANGER

Unless they're White niggas.

MARY

Hm.

STRANGER

(laughs) You know what I mean.

(pause)

STRANGER

Why you workin' here?

MARY

It's a job.

STRANGER
McDonald's is a job.

MARY
I don't know, I like art.

STRANGER
You like art.

MARY
Yeah, I like art. I saw the ad and I applied and now I'm here.

STRANGER
And you like working in this neighborhood?

MARY
It's okay.

STRANGER
It's okay. Yeah. It's okay. Shit.

MARY
You work around here?

STRANGER
Nah man.

(Pause)

STRANGER
I ride the bus.

MARY
The bus?

STRANGER
Yeah. *(starts singing "The End" by The Doors)* The Blue Bus, is calling us...

MARY
Where do you go?

STRANGER
Everywhere. Anywhere.

MARY

Hmm.

STRANGER

This whole place...it's all the same.

MARY

(Despondent. She is referring to something else) It really is.

STRANGER

You know what's up.

MARY

Maybe.

(pause)

MARY

It's getting darker.

STRANGER

Yeah the buses are never on time.

MARY

How long do you wait for them?

STRANGER

A couple of minutes. Sometimes longer. Sometimes they never come.

MARY

Then what do you do?

STRANGER

Walk.

MARY

In the cold?

STRANGER

Walking helps.

MARY

Is it better than the bus?

STRANGER

Different.

(They put out their cigarettes)

STRANGER

You working tomorrow?

MARY

Tomorrow is...Sunday. So no.

STRANGER

Yo listen it was nice meeting you...

MARY

Mary.

STRANGER

Mary. Mary, Mary quite contrary.

MARY

(laughs) I get that a lot.

STRANGER

Yo, thanks for this.

MARY

Yeah. Same.

STRANGER

(he extends his hand) Marcus.

MARY

Marcus, nice to meet you.

MARCUS

If you need help with the buses, you know where to find me.

MARY

(laughs softly)

MARCUS

See ya round, Mary.

(They go their separate ways)

SCENE 2:

(MARY is back at home. Her roommate, SHEENA, comes home.)

SHEENA

(singing JOEY BADASS'S PAPER TRAILS) Money ain't a thing if I got it. Money ain't a thing if I got it. They say money is the root of all evil, I say money is the route of all people. Cause we all follow paper trails, paper trails. And everybody gotta pay their bills, pay their bills.

MARY

Sheen?

SHEENA

(stands in front of MARY'S door with head phones in. She knows MARY is talking to her but stands in front of her rapping loudly. She is very invested in this song)

Before the money, there was love
But before the money, it was tough
Then came the money through a plug
It's a shame this ain't enough.

MARY

SHEENA.

SHEENA

(Takes her headphones out. You can hear the music coming from the ear buds)
MARY.

MARY

Where'd you go?

SHEENA

You know where.

MARY

I thought you don't work on Saturdays anymore.

SHEENA

I gotta work. The fuckin' Clark mothafuckers won't let me register if I don't pay them.

MARY

You said you got that sorted.

SHEENA

Some bitch ass nigga from accounts or whateva emailed me sayin I gotta pay or they won't let me go to class next week.

MARY

Fuck, I'm sorry.

SHEENA

Ai whateva, they always gotta take something. They gonna take and I gotta give or else. But they don't know, they don't know me. I'll give them what they want so long as they give me that degree.

(She walks away rapping loudly so we can still hear her)

Really started from the bottom, boy cotton
But they still planting plantations, we keep buying in
Closed-minded men
Pride is higher than the prices on your Pradas and
Balenciagas, balance my saga with the henny aqua
Me and my niggas tryna eat, you pussies empanada
The flow like plenty lava

(fade out)

SCENE 3

(A few days later. MARY stands outside the gallery smoking a cigarette. Mid day.)

MARY

(Addresses the audience)

There are people here that I do not know. This is a city that I have come to love but do not understand. There exists a gap here that divides the people—those who thrive and those are only living. They walk by this place and don't come in. A place where we don't know the difference between practicing compassion and pretending to be human.

(A WOMAN and Man approach MARY. They are dressed in baggy clothes and are smoking. They are holding hands. Right before they approach MARY, the MAN bends down to pick something up from the ground. Is it a penny? Half a cigarette?)

WOMAN
Hey gotta light?

MARY
(Handing a lighter to her) Hi! Yes.

WOMAN
You work here?

MARY
Yes, yes I do.

MAN
Don't tell her what's going on inside. It's a surprise.

MARY
Oh?

WOMAN
(to MARY) He won't tell me what it is!

MAN
That's the whole point! It's our 3-year anniversary.

WOMAN
On Halloween!

MARY
Oh wow, congratulations.

WOMAN
I'm so nervous! Wont you tell me what it is?

MAN
Nope, nope. You gotta wait and see.

MARY
How'd you hear about the event?

WOMAN

(excited) It's an event? Aw *baby*, what did you sign us up for?

MAN

I saw it in the uh Worcester Telegram.

MARY

Oh. I didn't think people actually read that.

MAN

We're always looking for free things to do.

WOMAN

Is there a bathroom here?

MARY

No. Unfortunately there isn't, I'm sorry.

MAN

Can you wait or do you need to—

WOMAN

No no I'll be okay.

MAN

What time does it start?

MARY

Um, in a few minutes.

WOMAN

There isn't anyone else here. It's so empty.

MARY

Yeah. I don't know, not a lot of people show up to these events, especially not on a Friday night on Halloween, so.

WOMAN

You have us!

MARY

Yeah, thank you for coming to this!

MAN

I heard there was going to be light snacks?

MARY

Oh yeah, there's candy.

WOMAN

Can we go in yet?

MARY

Sure, why not it doesn't look like anyone else is gonna show up.

(They all go inside.)

MARY

So thank you for coming to our Halloween night screening of Beatle Juice.

WOMAN

I've never seen this one before!

MAN

Happy Anniversary, baby.

(They kiss lightly)

MARY

The show will last for approximately 94 minutes.

MAN

(laughs) We don't have no where to go.

MARY

Okay then.

(She starts the movie)

WOMAN

Oh wait, can I have some candy?

MARY

Of course!

(she hands them a bowl of candy. A few minutes go by)

MAN

I'm sorry, do you have any more candy left?

MARY

There should be more around here. Let me go find some.

(She comes back with more candy)

MARY

Let me grab a kit kat.

WOMAN

Those are my favorite!

MARY

Mine too!

WOMAN

Thanks for the candy. It's just that we're homeless. So this is all we have for dinner tonight.

MARY

Oh.

(BLACK OUT)

SCENE 4

(SHEENA walks downtown and pass a homeless couple. This is the WOMAN and MAN who we see in the previous scene)

WOMAN

Spare some change?

(SHEENA rummages through her pockets and gives them a few dollars and walks away)

MAN
God bless you.

(BLACK OUT)

SCENE 5

(HERA stands outside Professor JACK's office. She is on the phone with her friend, MARY)

HERA
I'm going to speak with him about that now. Jack, he's an old professor of mine. He says there might be something I can do with the kids so I'm gonna—yeah yeah no, I know. What time do you get out of work?

(The door opens and JACK motions her for to enter)

Okay, I'll see you after. Gotta go.

(She hangs up)

JACK
Hey Hera! How's it going?

HERA
Good, how are you?

JACK
Busy, busy so busy. But busy is good, no?

HERA
That's what they say.

JACK
That's what they tell us, eh? So what have you been up to?

HERA
School. Grad school.

JACK
Oh yeah, what how's that going?

HERA

It's good. So far. Don't really know what the heck I'm doing but I feel like that's the general uh iterations from what I've been hearing.

JACK

What's the program again?

HERA

Um, community development and social change, urban planning stuff like that.

JACK

Oh yeah, in Worcester?

HERA

Yeah, yeah.

JACK

Community development? Well Worcester's a great place to study that.

HERA

Um. Yeah I guess so.

JACK

You still in Worcester, then?

HERA

Well yeah I mean, that's where my school is—

JACK

Man you need to get out of there Hera.

HERA

Wha—

JACK

You're so much better than this.

HERA

Um, I'm—

JACK

Move to New York or something. You need to leave.

HERA

Well I have another year left and then we'll see. It's really not that bad.

JACK

(gives her a look)

HERA

It's not! I have the kids—

JACK

Kids?

HERA

The students I teach at—

JACK

Ah, right, right. That's why we're meeting today—

HERA

And my friends, the city is magical when you—

JACK

Chicago has a good theatre scene, you should move to—

HERA

I'm not moving to Chi—

JACK

New York, Boston, even!

HERA

And do what there?

JACK

Whatever you want, just not here.

HERA

You work here.

JACK

Yeah and then I get to leave.

HERA

Jack I don't...I have my kids here. They're so great.

JACK
I don't know man.

HERA
What?

JACK
Just don't get stuck.

HERA
I'm not stuck. They need me. I need them.

JACK
You need them? How do you need them?

HERA
They give me things that—

JACK
They paying you?

HERA
Not the kids, the organization that I—yeah—

JACK
Oh, good!

HERA
What? Yeah but it's more than that. They are so...so special but no one tells them that.

JACK
That's not your job.

HERA
Um. Yes it is.

JACK
No. No it's not. This isn't your fight to fight, Hera.

(pause)

HERA

Who's fight is it then?

JACK

I don't know, but not yours.

HERA

(A little exasperated) These kids...these kids Jack they, they are fighting everyday and they don't even know it. Who's gonna fight with them if not us? You teach the same kids, a little older but still. Aren't you fighting with them?

JACK

Who am I fighting? I teach theatre.

HERA

Right.

JACK

I mean, hey, if you like it here that's fine just don't get stuck, that's all.

HERA

Anyway, about the show—

JACK

Yeah right, okay so what did you have in mind?

HERA

I have a friend who works at a gallery downtown so I'm trying to see if we can use that space to hold the performance there.

JACK

Oh cool, cool. What do you need from me?

HERA

I was thinking we could have our kids do a thing together, like a performance or something. You know, have both our kids write something...collaborate...something, I don't know.

JACK

Well my kids are on a pretty tight schedule—

HERA

Oh well that's okay I mean, I just thought it would make sense if we're gonna rent the space out—

JACK

Oh. You need someone to share the cost of the studio space.

HERA

Well, yeah. But if both our kids work together I think that—

JACK

I don't know Hera, our budget's pretty tight this year.

HERA

Okay well, let me know if anything changes. Cos' you know—

JACK

Of course, yeah—

HERA

Thanks.

JACK

You know, you should come have dinner with Jenny and I sometime.

HERA

Th—

JACK

We just got a kitten—

HERA

Aw, that's nice. Yeah, maybe.

JACK

We'll love to have you! You still dating that boy?

HERA

Which one?

JACK

(laughs a little too long) The one I met that one time outside the studio...

HERA

Nick? Oh no. No. That was...no.

JACK
Don't get stuck Hera.

(she gets up, ready to leave)

HERA
I'm not stuck, Jack.

JACK
If you say so!

HERA
Tell Jenny I say hi.

JACK
Will do.

HERA
Thanks for seeing me.

JACK
You got it.

HERA
Okay, well, I'm gonna—

JACK
Yup, have a good one!

(HERA exits)

SCENE 6

(MARY at the gallery)

MARY
(Addressing the audience)
We're all trying to live, aren't we? We just want to be okay. We all think we're special with our jobs, university degrees, fancy food, organic milk, gluten free bagels, membership

cards to Macy's and Bass pro, our farmer's markets, our ability to try "ethnic" food whenever we want, IKEA, weekend vacations, summer weddings, evening plans, the loans we have to pay back, the part-time job that doesn't pay enough to help sustain our vices, beer festivals, museum tours, day passes, getting our parking tickets validated like we've scored some big wins, passing by homeless people in our Subaru's, Starbucks, pictures of us at the gym and then pictures of our kale smoothies, "post gym treat!", 10 likes on Facebook, a comment from your Mom asking where you went to get that, another one from a friend who you haven't seen in awhile, "I just had that a few days ago, it was great!, Miss you!", a sudden realization of your own mortality, our important phone calls that make us hold our heads in our hands, frowning, where we look up occasionally to mouth the words "goodbye" or "thank you", rental cars, chocolate diamonds, Michael Kors bags, we're all so fancy. They say 'White people' like we're the devil. I'm just trying to live.

(HERA enters)

HERA

Mary!

MARY

Hey.

HERA

This day is ridiculous.

MARY

What happened?

HERA

There is a bigger picture here at hand and I don't think people see it. I don't understand it. I don't understand this giant game and politics and bureaucracy and all the people involved in this don't see the bigger picture.

MARY

What do you mean?

HERA

We are doomed.

MARY

You need a drink?

HERA

I need to get out.

MARY

What happened?

HERA

He said it's not my fight to fight. He said these kids aren't my fight to fight. He teaches these same kids!

MARY

Who said that?

HERA

Jack!

MARY

Your old professor?

HERA

Yeah.

MARY

So I guess he's not on board.

HERA

Yeah.

MARY

We'll figure something out.

(Pause)

HERA

How was your day?

MARY

Meh. An old lady came in and told me to accept Jesus again.

HERA

Ha.

MARY

I told her I worship the devil.

HERA

That should do the trick.

MARY

I hope so.

HERA

Wanna get dinner soon? It's almost dark out.

MARY

Sure.

(They leave)

SCENE 7

(SHEENA in her room. Listening to CAPTIAL STEEZ'S SURVIVAL TACTICS. She is rapping along in the mirror, or the audience)

Yo, fuck the police nigga
Fuck every ass corrupt politician on Wall Street
P.E, Public Enemy, Assassinate us, bitch
Fuck that, fuck everything son
Fuck government, Fuck, listenin' and shit

You want fuckin' energy? Dickheads

It's like 6 milli ways to die my nigga choose one
Doomsday comin' start investin' in a few guns
New gats, booby traps, and bazooka straps
Better play your cards right, no booster packs
Everybody claim they used to rap
But these ain't even punchlines no more, I'm abusing tracks Leaving instrumentals blue
and black
I'm in Marty McFly mode, so tell em' that the future's back
Riding on hoverboards, wiping out motherboards
Stopped spitting fire cause my motherfuckin lung is scorched
King Arthur when he swung his sword
A king author I ain't even use a pen in like a month or four I had a hard time writing lyrics
Now I'm way over heads, science fiction
You can try and get it, my man the flyest with it
With a mind of fine of interest for your finest interests

They say hard work pays off Well tell the Based God don't quit his day job
Cause P.E's about to take off With protons and electrons homie that's an A-bomb
Fuckin' ridiculous Finger to the president screamin' "fuck censorship!"
If Obama got that president election Then them P.E. boys bout to make an intervention
Fuck what I once said, I want the blood shed Cause now-a-days for respect you gotta
pump lead
I guess Columbine was listenin' to Chaka Khan
And Pokémon wasn't gettin' recognized at Comic-Con
It's like we've been content with losin'
And half our students fallen victim to the institution
Jobs are scarce since the Scientific Revolution
And little kids are shootin' Uzi's cause its given to 'em
Little weapon, code name: Smith and Wesson
And you'll be quick to catch a bullet like an interception
If your man's tryna disrespect it Send a message and it's over in a millisecond - nigga

SCENE 8

THE WHITE PEOPLE/DEVELOPERS IN THE AREA AT DINNER

(A bunch of developers, people from city government and JACK at Denny's for dinner)

JOEY

So what did they all say about the redevelopment in the area?

JACK

I don't care so long as they get rid of all the drugs.

CITY OFFICIAL # 1

They're trying to make that area full-priced apartments.

JACK

Good, no more section 8 housing here. Hopefully the prostitution will go away.

CITY OFFICIAL # 2

Whatever helps them get re-elected.

(Waitress, ROSA takes their order)

ROSA
Hi! What can I get for you guys?

CITY OFFICIAL # 1
I'll get the beef sliders, hold the grease.

(The men laugh)

ROSA
Okay...

JOEY
House salad.

ROSA
Dressing?

JOEY
(shakes his hand motioning that he doesn't need any)

ROSA
And for you?

JACK
What kind of cheese is in the omelet?

ROSA
I'm not sure.

JACK
Could you go check, please?

ROSA
(tight) Sure.

(ROSA exists)

JACK
They have one job. How are they ever gonna get ahead if—

JOEY
When's the next meeting for—

(ROSA re-enters)

ROSA
American.

JACK
American?

ROSA
American cheese is in the omelet.

JACK
Okay, I'll have American.

ROSA
Of course.

(ROSA starts to walk away before JACK calls over to her. He signals for her to come over with his fingers. She comes back.)

ROSA
Yes?

JACK
Get us more coffee will you, dear?

ROSA
Of course.

(she walks away)

Punta.

SCENE 9

(ROSA ends her shift. She counts her tips, grabs her bag. She is tired. She says goodnight to the kitchen staff)

WHITE MAN WITH A PONY TAIL AKA ROSA'S BOSS
Rosa, we need someone to cover Carol's Thursday's shift.

ROSA
(sighs) I can't do Thursday I've told you I have my kid's PTA meeting on Thursday—

WHITE MAN WITH A PONY TAIL AKA ROSA'S BOSS
It's a double.

ROSA
Shit.

WHITE MAN WITH A PONY TAIL AKA ROSA'S BOSS
I need to know so I can put you on the chart.

ROSA
Tsk.

WHITE MAN WITH A PONY TAIL AKA ROSA'S BOSS
The chart Rosa! The chart needs to know!

(PAUSE)

ROSA
Put me on.

WHITE MAN WITH A PONY TAIL AKA ROSA'S BOSS
(singing a made up song in falsetto) Put me on, baby, all night long, baby.

ROSA
(Rolls her eyes and leaves)

SCENE 10

(ROSA smokes a cigarette. She is walking back home. She passes the homeless couple on the street)

WOMAN
Hey, could we bum a cig?

ROSA
(takes one out) Here.

MAN

God bless you.

(BLACK OUT)

SCENE 11

(ROSA goes back home. The house is quiet. She goes into a bedroom for a moment and returns. We see a child sleeping in the bed. She puts her money in a container and sits down. She addresses the audience)

ROSA

I can only do so much. I can only say so much. I am only in control of so much. I am a mother. This is my job. Why do they make it so hard for me to do my job? Layla comes home to an empty house and that's the best I can do. I am doing my best to make this work. But when you're working 12 hours, it makes you think. We've fallen short to this institution. And we're unable to break out of it. Bills need to get paid. Dishes need cleaning. Homework needs to be finished. I live through the ancestors who came before me. That's the best I can do.

SCENE 12

(The next morning at ROSA'S house. LAYLA, her daughter sits down for breakfast)

LAYLA

Mama?

(pause)

LAYLA

MAMA!

ROSA

(from another room) Yeah baby?

LAYLA

Why are we eating potatoes for breakfast?

ROSA

What?

LAYLA

Why are we eating potatoes for breakfast?

ROSA

Cos that's what I want you to eat.

LAYLA

But it's all dried out.

ROSA

Then don't eat it.

LAYLA

(Eats the potatoes)

(ROSA emerges from the other room)

ROSA

Potatoes are good for you. They grow from the ground. Not produced in some factory shit. No chemicals.

LAYLA

Yeah but it's so—

ROSA

Delicious? Nutritious? Yummy?

LAYLA

Um, no...

ROSA

Yes it is! See! Look I'm eating it!

(ROSA eats some potatoes. She tries to enjoy herself)

LAYLA

You hate it too.

ROSA

Ai baby, we'll have something different tomorrow okay.

LAYLA

Are you coming to the PTA meeting today?

ROSA

Finish your food, we gotta leave soon.

LAYLA

Mama are you coming?

ROSA

I'll try.

LAYLA

That means no.

ROSA

That means I'll try.

LAYLA

(Sighs) Is Daddy coming?

ROSA

He'll try.

LAYLA

So *no one's* coming?

ROSA

You'll be there! You're smart! You tell them it's all a joke anyway. A bunch of snobby ass teachers—

LAYLA

Ms. Hera is nice—

ROSA

That's because she actually gives a shit—baby listen, I'm gonna try to be there, okay. Daddy is going to try to be there. You just worry about listening in class and sit in front, don't let the other kids—

LAYLA

I know.

ROSA

Because you smart!

LAYLA

Okay I seriously can't eat anymore of this, I'll go to school and have breakfast.

ROSA

Tsk.

LAYLA

What?

ROSA

Nothing. C'mon baby, lets go.

(They walk to school)

SCENE 13

(HERA at home with her boyfriend, KEVIN. They are talking before HERA leaves for work. She attends Clark as a 5th year Master's in Education student. She is LAYLA'S teacher)

HERA

I HEAR YOU, OKAY? GOD, I HEAR YOU.

KEVIN

Hera there's nothing—

HERA

Bullshit! Don't come *at me* with that bullshit—

KEVIN

It's not—

HERA

Kevin. Please. Please don't do this. You know that's bullshit. So don't even—don't—c'mon, shit.

(Pause)

HERA

I don't know.

KEVIN

You don't know? I do. You talk about these kids like...like their your *own*. Like they your own flesh and blood—

HERA

BUT I CAN'T DO ANYTHING.

KEVIN

I didn't mean it like that. Okay. You can it's—

HERA

I wanted to do this because I *wanted to*, K. I wanted to—I thought maybe—I thought maybe, I could do something. You know? I thought I, right me again, always me again, it comes full circle, I wanted something, who cares? I wanted to help. I saw this and I thought, "I can do something real. Because I have all these things I can do, all these ideas that could really help". But I can't. I'm just about cog. I'm just another motherfucking cog and nothing I do will bring him back. There is *literally nothing I can do*. So no...no I can't. I know that. You don't have to remind me.

KEVIN

Yes but here's your chance, why can't you see—?

HERA

My chance to do what? Listen, he's gone. He's fuckin'....

KEVIN

This is so...stupid.

HERA

What?

KEVIN

I can't see you like this anymore. This is a waste of time.

HERA

Hear you making all these declarations to who?

KEVIN

Something's gonna give Hera, I can smell it, I can taste it in the air. Something's gonna give and you know it too. You know it just as much as I do so this right here, *this*, this is stupid as hell.

MS. HERA

No. That's not fair. You can't expect me to what? Huh? To testify? To say that, yeah he was a bad kid, he did this and this and that and---bullshit! He wasn't! He wasn't bad. You just wanna believe it cos that's easy. It's easy to not feel anything for someone once you got it in your head that they didn't deserve to be alive anyway but you and I both know that ain't what this is about. Kay... You think this is so *easy*?

KEVIN

I never said this was easy—

HERA

You never had to *say* it.

KEVIN

Don't push me around like this.

(pause)

HERA

We're not doing this here.

KEVIN

Why not?

HERA

I don't want to right now.

KEVIN

Hera you never want to. You don't know what it's like going home anymore. You don't know how much I want to pick up the phone and call you and walk to your house and wait on your fucking steps, waiting, just waiting to hear your keys jingle...so we can actually talk about this. You say how much you want to talk and invest in dialogue and all that shit but you can't even fucking talk about—

HERA

This is different Kevin.

KEVIN

You don't know what this is about.

HERA

Oh I don't know?

KEVIN

You have no idea. You think you do but really you have no *clue*.

(pause)

HERA

Probably.

(pause)

HERA

Do you?

KEVIN

Yes. I do.

HERA

Are you gonna make me beg?

KEVIN

Hera your running thin. You're unraveling. You walk around like...I can't see you like this no more.

HERA

Say it.

KEVIN

What do you want me to say?

HERA

Say what you really want to say.

KEVIN

Why do you think I have something to say?

HERA

Okay Kevin, don't say it. Don't say anything. I don't care.

(she starts packing up)

KEVIN

Where are you going?

HERA

What do you care?

KEVIN

I'm sorry—

HERA

No I'm sorry. Okay? I'm *sorry*. I can't stand around and pretend like this city is going to take care of itself. I need to do this. I need to leave. I'm late for work.

KEVIN

What are you talking about?

HERA

He doesn't deserve this.

KEVIN

He's not here anymore!

HERA

He is! He's here. (*she points to her temple*) And he's going to stay here until I do something. You don't understand, that's fine.

KEVIN

You're obsessed Hera! Okay? You want me to say it? Fuck. You're fucking obsessed with this. You let this get to you like—

HERA

How can I not be?

(*pause*)

HERA

You deal one more time and we're done.

KEVIN

I'm not the problem! This has nothing to do with—

HERA

YES YOU ARE. And yes it does.

KEVIN

How can you say that?

HERA

Are you kidding me?

KEVIN

These things happen, Hera. You've lived here long enough. You should know. Kids get shot *all the time*.

HERA

That doesn't make it right.

KEVIN

It's not about right or wrong. Why can't you see that?

HERA

Because I just don't. I don't just believe that everything is black or white. Okay. Marcus... Marcus had nothing to do with this. And yet he's the one who's dead. You're telling me you can't see how fucked up that is?

KEVIN

I'm not saying it's not fucked up—

HERA

Then what are you saying?

KEVIN

Will you let me finish?

(Pause)

KEVIN

I do what I do because that's all I know. I'm not trying to hurt anybody. That's not my intention.

HERA

Fuck your intentions. To hell with your intentions! Intentions don't matter here. They never matter. It's about what happened and what didn't happen.

KEVIN

I don't now what to tell you then.

HERA

I know.

KEVIN

Hera. You told me yourself. Never make a choice you don't believe in.

HERA

I said don't make a choice you can't live with.

KEVIN

It's the same thing.

HERA

Well that's our problem then.

(pause)

HERA

I'm going to work.

KEVIN

I love you.

(HERA looks at him before leaving)

SCENE 14

HERA

It's a cycle...it's a self perpetuating cycle where the poor are kept where they are so that there is space for the rich. There is a system at play here that isn't being talked about and I am frustrated that we aren't talking about this is class. We are not getting angry. We are not crying we are not fighting we are not feeling enough. This is happening around us and we are so concerned with what parties to go to or what version of the Iphone is out and I'm done. We are not untied as a people and that is hurtful. These *men* speak of crackheads and prostitutes as if they were born that way, as if they chose to be this way and chose to lead these lives and how dare you go into the system and perpetuate this while you're trying to stop it and do something about it. You are trying to fix the problem that you perpetuate. But this is not just one person. This is not just one person doing this. We are the problem. Our negligence our indifference our apathy is the problem and our inability to be mobile as a people is hurting us. Our bubbles keep us separated. It's these kids who I teach who have to go home to a house where the electricity gets cut off and down the street these men, these men who go to my school which is reputable for being socially conscious say in a tone that this isn't section 8 housing because god forbid they have people in the community who can't afford full market priced houses.

SCENE 15

(ROSA cleaning a house. This is her second job)

MS. BETTY

Rosa! Hello! How are you?

ROSA

I'm good Betty, thank you. How are—

MS. BETTY

Did you pick up the containers from—

ROSA

Right here.

MS. BETTY

Perfect, thank you.

ROSA

I had a question about dinner tonight, did you want the—

MS. BETTY

Oh you know, I picked up some food from the senior's center where I volunteer once a month. Very nice people there. So you know, it's up to you, you could make the chili or just give this to the girls, although the chili keeps well for a day, you know let it soak up...

ROSA

Okay, so I'll make the chili and—

MS. BETTY

It's up to you but yes. Also! I got Katie a new bed! You want to see?

ROSA

Sure...

MS. BETTY

It's beautiful. It's really really wonderful. I was thinking of converting the playroom upstairs into another bedroom because the girls don't use that room anymore, it's just a waste of space, really. So...*(she pulls it up on her phone)* Oh good it's shipped! It's a canopy bed, with wonderful embroidered upholstery that falls over the sides of the iron

poles—did I tell you it's made out of iron? So we can spray paint it, you know, it will look...and then what I was thinking, we could move the couch from upstairs, because the dresser we have up there now just won't look nice next to the couch, it just doesn't go. And see, here are the swatches for the headboard...Aren't these beautiful? And I went to Pottery Barn and found matching curtains but I'm not sure if I want them to be light or dark purple...but I was also thinking about Roman drapes or Scalloped Roman...I'm not sure yet. I'll have to look at samples this weekend...actually I was wondering if you could pack up Maggie's room while I'm away. I just installed a cabinet for her doll clothes, they have these American doll dresses that Maggie and I made, they look so adorable. Oh! I was wondering if you could stay with Maggie for her ballet lessons on Friday?

(The dialogue continues but ROSA speaks over MS. BETTY. MS BETTY'S dialogue fades out but her words are projected behind ROSA)

ROSA

This is the problem, am I right? When you have too much money. When your life becomes ballet classes, and violin lessons, and what type of motherfucking curtains match your motherfucking sheets. We all know what is what after that. These rich folk don't know how much they got. Even their dolls have their down furniture! They say I'm a single Latina woman working against the system. I don't see no system here. I see this woman. And I see her family. And I see the house they got, because she's a doctor and her husband works in finance. I see it. They pay me \$18.50 an hour to clean their house. I know that's good. But I drive an hour there and an hour back. That's 2 hours. That's \$36 no one's payin me. That's \$180 a week, \$720 a month, \$8640 a year. That pays for me and Layla's food, for a year. And I mean steak tips and chocolate fucking pudding every night. What I would give...what I would give. Where's the system? Who's part of this? I want to talk to them. What's the number? Who do I speak to? I wanna ask them, why do I make \$500 a week and Ms. Betty makes \$2000? Because she's White? Nah. Because she's rich. And rich people make other rich people and it's a chain reaction. I'm tellin ya. But I'll see that my Layla makes \$2500 a week! Heck make it \$5000 a week! She'll be making so much money she won't know what to do with it! Give it away! Give it all away! Make it but not on someone else's back. I'll give my back to Layla so she won't have to give hers.

MS. BETTY

Rosa?

ROSA

What's that?

MS. BETTY

Ballet on Friday?

ROSA

Nah sorry, I gotta spend time with Layla.

MS. BETTY

I see. Maybe Layla could come with you and stay while you wait for Maggie?

ROSA

You want me to bring Layla to your house?

MS. BETTY

Sure, it'll be a nice experience for her!

ROSA

(looks at the audience then back at MS. BETTY) This Friday?

MS. BETTY

Yeah! Maybe Layla would want to take ballet lessons too!

ROSA

Layla doesn't need classes to learn how to dance.

MS. BETTY

They're very professional. One of the instructors is from England!

ROSA

They dance different in England?

MS. BETTY

Well no. But it's a good cultural learning experience for the students.

ROSA

Why she speak a different language?

MS. BETTY

Not but she has an accent!

ROSA

Ya, okay. I'll bring Layla.

MS. BETTY

Wonderful. Thank you so much. It really means a lot.

ROSA

(To the audience) Bitch better pay me overtime.

MS. BETTY

I've got a hair appointment. It's so nice that you're here because now I can finally do all the things that I don't get to!

(MS. BETTY leaves)

ROSA

El desafío más grande después del éxito está cerrando en torno a ella .

(English translation: The biggest challenge after success is shutting up about it.)

SCENE 16: CLASSROOM CHAOS

(HERA and SHEENA in class)

PROFESSOR

How was everyone's Labor Day?

(mumbles)

PROFESSOR

Wow, that well, huh? We went hiking, and then my wife got poison ivy and passed it to me, so it can't be as bad as that.

JIM

(laughing) Nothing's as bad as poison ivy.

SHEENA

Nothing?

PROFESSOR

How we all doing with our interviews?

HERA

Our group interviewed the guys over at downtown but they seemed...reluctant to give us information about how the police report was written.

PROFESSOR

Did you upload your transcript to the class page?

HERA

Yeah it's up there but really they kept talking about the summer initiatives and how that's going to improve youth violence but I don't know. Seemed like they were covering something up.

JIM

Oooo...sounds like a mystery.

HERA

(Ignores JIM) But this guy I think his name is Joey, um, his name is...

RAJ

Joseph Carlson.

HERA

Thanks Raj. Joseph Carlson. I think he's on the district as a councilmen doing something...I don't know what, but he's title is there somewhere. He said something about the investigation getting put on hold. But then he quickly changed topic.

JIM

Why is their group so much more exciting than ours?

RAJ

Jim this isn't a game.

JIM

Yo chill out Raj man.

PROFESSOR

How about the other groups?

HERA

Are you going to say anything about what we found?

PROFESSOR

I'll read the transcript you posted. And then we can schedule a meeting for next week.

HERA

Tsk.

RAJ

We also interviewed Marcus's Mom. And she gave us information about Marcus's school and what he did and stuff like that. So that was helpful.

PROFESSOR

Good. Make sure you upload the document so everyone can read it.

HERA

I just feel like, I don't know. Like we're not doing something. Like all these interviews are going nowhere.

PROFESSOR

It can feel like that, I'm sure. But we just have to keep in mind what the root of the project is. You know. When do boys lose hope. If we have that in the back of our minds it will help guide the questions we're asking. I mean, this is the hard part of doing research. We will have to keep digging until we find something, or until something sticks out and makes us think about it in a different way.

SHEENA

Hm. I also had a question about how to—

JIM

When are our final reports due?

SHEENA

(To RAJ) Did this motherfucker just interrupt me?

RAJ

(shrugs his shoulders)

PROFESSOR

In three weeks. It's on the syllabus. Sheena what were you going to ask?

SHEENA

I forgot.

PROFESSOR

Okay well, let's get into our groups and—

(SHEENA packs her things and leaves)

PROFESSOR

Continue our discussion. I'm passing around the discussion questions. We'll take 20 minutes and come back at around 1.15pm.

SCENE 17

(KEVIN on his lunch break, walks to the gallery and meets MARY for the first time)

MARY

Hello there.

KEVIN

Hi.

(He walks around inspecting the art work for some time)

MARY

Anything I can help you with?

KEVIN

I don't know, can you?

(Is he flirting?)

MARY

I can try.

(he chuckles)

KEVIN

So what is this place?

MARY

(distracted by an email she received) The gallery... is...um. Sorry bout that. It's um—

KEVIN

No no that's fine. Busy day?

MARY

Kinda, not really.

KEVIN

I see.

MARY

Right. The gallery is a space allocated by City Hall in conjunction with the cultural coalition as their attempt to revitalize Worcester's downtown area. We put on activities and workshops for free, for the community and fellow local and neighboring artists.

KEVIN

Well done.

MARY

Thanks.

KEVIN

How long you guys open for?

MARY

Until 8pm. Monday through Saturday.

KEVIN

You're the only one here?

MARY

No I have an assistant but she does mornings and I do evenings.

KEVIN

Cool, cool. No one bothers you?

MARY

What do you mean?

KEVIN

You know.

MARY

What at night?

KEVIN

Well, yeah.

MARY

No, it's been good so far. Why should I be worried?

KEVIN

Well, you know. It's Worcester.

MARY

That's what everyone keeps telling me.

KEVIN

Probably true.

MARY

I don't know. I kind of like it here. I've made some friends.

KEVIN

From across the street?

MARY

Yeah. I have lunch there sometimes.

KEVIN

(Gives her a look like you're an interesting one)

MARY

You should try it.

KEVIN

Well, if I'm in the mood to give away food or money I will.

MARY

Ah. I see. And what do you do?

KEVIN

I'm over at the health department.

MARY

A pill pusher. I'm joking.

KEVIN

Not quite, not quite. A little but not quite.

MARY

Sorry?

KEVIN

(laughs) Nothing.

(pause)

KEVIN

Well, I'm out of here. Have a good day.

MARY

Oh. Okay. Thanks for coming in.

(KEVIN leaves)

MARY

(to herself) Weird.

SCENE 18: WHO DO YOU KNOW?

(Light movement transitions to a corner where we watch KEVIN exit the gallery to walk back to work. MAN and WOMAN are on the corner, playing cards)

MAN

Baby you only get to pick one.

WOMAN

Those aren't the rules—

MAN

You gotta take it---

WOMAN

I know what—

MAN

Then do it already—

WOMAN

If you'd shut up about—

MAN

Well it's hard for me to do this with you yapping—

WOMAN
I'm not yapping—

MAN
“I'm not yapping—

WOMAN
(to KEVIN) Hey!

(KEVIN walks by. He turns)

MAN
We know you from somewhere!

KEVIN
I don't think so, I'm sorry.

WOMAN
Nah, we definitely know you from—Baby where do we know him from?

MAN
I don't know but—

KEVIN
Have a good afternoon.

(He walks away quickly)

SCENE 19: WE'RE ALL FRINEDS HERE

(At the gallery. MARY is hosting a Jazz Night at the gallery. People scattered around the table. There are hors d'oeuvres. MARY and SHEENA are in a corner snacking while the live band plays.)

SHEENA
(referring to how 'White' everything is) Can you believe this shit?

MARY
Shut up and enjoy the free food.

SHEENA
Tsk. Whatever.

(KEVIN enters with HERA)

HERA
Mary!

SHEENA
Who dat?

MARY
That's Hera. You guys need to know each other.

SHEENA
Why? She famous?

MARY
Just be nice. *(To HERA)* Hi!

HERA
This is my Kevin.

KEVIN
Hi, Kevin.

HERA
Kevin, this is Mary, and—

SHEENA
(with food in her mouth) Sheena.

KEVIN
What's up Sheena?

SHEENA
Good to see a brother here.

MARY
How was work?

HERA
It's Friday. No work talk.

SHEENA

You right!

HERA
How do you know Mary?

SHEENA
We have the same drug dealer.

HERA
What?

MARY
We're roommates.

HERA
Oh! Okay. Cool.

MARY
And how do you two know each other?

KEVIN
We also, share the same drug dealer.

SHEENA
(laughs) Yo my boy could hook yall up for real, though.

MARY
Anyway.

KEVIN
We met at a networking event.

HERA
Some kinda things for professional educators, funded by some program...who knows. I just went cos they were paying teachers to get trained.

SHEENA
They should save the money and pay the students to sit through boring ass class.

MARY
Hera's actually a middle school teacher—

SHEENA

That don't change anything. What, so you go your degree in education that means you know how to teach?

HERA

I actually completely agree—

KEVIN

I'm going to use the bathroom.

(Kevin leaves)

SHEENA

Your boy don't look too happy.

HERA

I made him do this with me, he was playing video games before this, so.

MARY

Well you guys keep talking, I gotta go schmooze.

SHEENA

Yo, I'm bringing these crackers back. Tell your boss to go get more!

MARY

Are you referring to the food or—

SHEENA

Tsk, yes the food!

(Mary leaves)

HERA

And so what do you do?

SHEENA

I go to Clark.

HERA

Oh wow, we have a ton of teachers from Clark.

SHEENA

White?

HERA

Yeah. Mostly...all of them.

SHEENA

Hmm.

HERA

I'm just tired of having to pretend, you know what I mean?

SHEENA

(grabbing more food) No.

HERA

Pretend like the shit they go through doesn't affect me, like it's not supposed to be something we concern ourselves with.

SHEENA

Listen, I've been pretending for so long now I don't even know what's real anymore.

(KEVIN comes back)

KEVIN

There's a guy in the bathroom who's unconscious.

HERA

We should tell—

SHEENA

(She yells across the gallery) MARY THERE'S A DEAD GUY IN THE BATHROOM!

(Lights)

SCENE 20: LET'S FUCK SHIT UP

(MARY, SHEENA, and HERA meet for the first time. "Hey" by MF Doom plays. This is a movement piece. The choreography should reflect the title of this scene.)

-Intermission-

SCENE 21: OKAY, NOW HERE WE GO

(Back at the gallery. Everyone has left except MARY, SHEENA, KEVIN, HERA, and the MAN, who is the same man as in the first scene. MARY and SHEENA are in the bathroom. HERA and KEVIN are in the main foyer. MARY walks out)

HERA
How is he?

MARY
He's fine. He'll be fine.

HERA
What happened?

MARY
Apparently it's tiring to be poor. He passed out. Didn't eat enough for the day.

HERA
Oh.

KEVIN
Where is he now?

MARY
Sheena's talking to him in the bathroom.

HERA
Can we do something?

MARY
I don't know. What can we do?

(uncomfortable pause)

KEVIN
We should probably get going.

HERA
You go ahead, I'll stay with them.

MARY

No that's okay. You guys get going, there's nothing we can do about this.

HERA

It takes one person to address a problem and do something about it... said someone.

MARY

I appreciate that. Unfortunately, that's not how the world works. Anyway, thanks for staying guys. Kevin, it was nice to meet you.

(HERA and KEVIN walk out. The next scenes take place simultaneously. HERA and KEVIN'S conversation is filmed as they walk home. Their section is projected on a screen behind the action on stage. SHEENA and The Man, enters)

MARY

How is he?

THE MAN

I'm good. Nice to see you again, Mary.

MARY

Do we know each other?

THE MAN

Marcus, remember? *(sings)* The Blue Bus is calling us...

MARY

Oh my god.

SHEENA

The fuck is going on?

(They freeze, projection of HERA and KEVIN walking home)

HERA

What'd you think?

KEVIN

Of your friends?

HERA

Everything.

KEVIN

You're friends are cool. That was weird with what happened to that guy though.

HERA

Hmm.

KEVIN

You seem distracted.

HERA

I'm always distracted.

KEVIN

What is it now?

HERA

I'm just thinking about a kid at school.

KEVIN

Like randomly?

HERA

No. What happened to that guy reminded me of a kid at school.

KEVIN

Oh.

(We go back to MARY, SHEENA and MARCUS)

SHEENA

How you guys know each other?

MARY

From the gallery. Weeks ago.

MARCUS

Mary mary quite contrary.

SHEENA

Oh you guys are like, friends.

HERA

She wrote on her folder, “Keep Calm and Love Me”. I mean, I feel like all these girls need is something beautiful in their life. Just for them. They just find it in the most unfortunate ways.

KEVIN

What do you mean?

HERA

Like, I don’t know. Having a baby when your 14. Just a beautiful baby that’s yours, you know? That’s all they want. Nothing in their life is beautiful.

KEVIN

Yeah but that’s what you think. You don’t know for sure.

HERA

I know enough.

(pause)

HERA

She’s seriously beautiful too. In a demanding way. And she’s 12.

KEVIN

That’s the worst time to be seriously beautiful. You get popular too young and then its over too soon.

HERA

I don’t want to think about this anymore. Let’s go to bed.

(HERA turns the lights off, a beat.)

KEVIN

I love you.

HERA

I know.

(Lights)

SCENE 22: THE DANCE

(ROSA listening to “Ma vlast (My Fatherland): No. 2 Vltava Moldau” by Bedrich Smetana, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra classical music while cooking dinner, pretending to be the maestro. She is listening. It is late at night. Layla walks in)

LAYLA
Mama?

(ROSA turns and doesn't say anything. She continues waving her hands in the air, pretending to be the maestro of an orchestra.)

LAYLA
Mama what are you doing?

ROSA
Dance with me, darling!

LAYLA
What?

(ROSA takes LAYLA by the hand and spins her around)

ROSA
Dance Layla, dance! Dance with me baby!

LAYLA
What are you listening to?

ROSA
(she laughs) I don't know, it came on the radio and it's so beautiful!

LAYLA
We learned about this kinda music in school.

ROSA
(They keep dancing) Whatever it is, I love it.

LAYLA
Turn it up, Mama!

ROSA
Okay!

(ROSA turns it up. They laugh and dance, and spin each other around the room. All of a sudden we hear the sound of an ambulance and police sirens. ROSA turns the music up louder)

LAYLA
The water! It's boiling!

(ROSA, still dancing, runs to turn it off)

ROSA
You hungry?

LAYLA
Yes!

ROSA
Go get a plate, I'll save some for Papa first.

LAYLA
Where's papa tonight?

ROSA
Working baby.

LAYLA
Papa always works.

ROSA
You wanna eat? We gotta work.

LAYLA
Hmm.

(pause)

ROSA
Tell me about your day, baby.

(lights)

SCENE 22: CLASSROOM CHAOS #2

SHEENA

I'm sorry but am I the only one here who thinks that was complete bullshit? Are you kidding me? They left their hope under their mattress? Fuck you. Fuck you Jim. From the very first day of this class you've been makin jokes but I'm not going to shut up anymore.

JIM

I'm sorry it was just a joke.

SHEENA

No you don't get to apologize. You don't get to apologize to me. This isn't about me. This isn't about any of us. This is about the community that you claim to be helping. This is about those families, those young people, those boys who have been killed by things people like you are saying. They hear you say shit like that, how you take their lives as a fucking joke and they start to believe it. We all start to believe it.

And you know what Jim, this time, I'm not packing my shit up. I'm gonna sit right here. So you don't get the pleasure of my absence. You're going to have to sit here and fucking deal with me. I'm done. Anything anybody else want to say? And to those of you who laughed, just know that you're part of the problem as well. Men of color, you know who you are. Once you share in this sort of inhumane debauchery of humanity, you're just cowering in your Master's shadow, begging for affirmation. It's pathetic. We're stronger than this. So Jim, the next time you want to make a fucking joke out of someone's suffering, I hope you think twice, because every time you do that, a little part of you dies in that joke.

(SHEENA walks out. Everyone else freezes. Black Out.)

(End of ACT I. MAYBE)

Analysis

For as long as I can remember, I have always been curious about people. This curiosity propelled me in the direction of theatre and writing which allowed me to discover and learn about as many people as I wanted. Writing is a way to transcend human experience. Hence, I am searching for a deeper meaning in the work that I do within my community through active engagement in *all* interactions. It is through this process of being critically conscious and actively listening to the world around me that I am able to make sense of the work that I do both as an artist as well as within my community. The following paragraphs analyze scenes that speak to these unspoken nuances as well as the intimate and ephemeral experiences that we encounter throughout our day and how that should inform our practice. Ultimately, I hope it helps practitioners in this field understand the importance of being able to teach and accept different ideas of how practice and research can be conducted.

The first example are the moments that we experience in class where we shift uncomfortably in our seats when someone says something that illuminates their assumptions or prejudice but we're incapable of addressing it in the moment. I wanted to show how we can learn how to understand discomfort and how we confront classroom chaos as it has a direct correlation to how we handle similar situations outside of the classroom and in our field of community development. In Scene 16, I wanted to highlight the tension that is often felt in classroom environments, especially in classroom experiences that I have been a part of where confrontation about something that someone said, or a reference that was made goes unnoticed or unheard, at the expense of someone else. Classrooms can be a violent

place where people feel attacked and betrayed, or worse, alienated. For example, the thoughts and conversations that should be addressed in the classroom are often targeted to the friends near by, instead of directly confronting or ameliorating the situation immediately. When Sheena is interrupted by Jim, no one notices or says anything. Sheena asks her friend rhetorically, if “this mothefucker just interrupted [her]”. Now this might appear like an inconsequential, causal, and relatively harmful interaction. However, what I began to notice was how dangerously causal instances like this became in the classroom. Power dynamics in the classroom need to be addressed, just like how they need to be addressed in any other space where different groups of people come together. Even more in the context of Community Engagement. How are we going to learn how to be respectful, engaging, and truly reciprocal individuals when we don’t learn how to confront rudeness and learn how to stand up for ourselves? How is Jim going to learn that he takes up more space than he needs and in doing so, can hurt potential relationships if no one is going to tell him, in a loving way, they he needs to learn to be more aware of himself? All these instances that happen in the classroom get translated into the real world where our attitudes and behavior impact more than just a discussion about a group project. This makes it important for us to learn how to recognize these situations, and then to confront them in a manner that is helpful and informing.

As we travel beyond the classroom and into the streets in Main South, the act of confrontation suddenly becomes negotiable as we shred our layers and identity of ‘the student’ and become ‘the civilian’. Obviously disassociation occurs theoretically, as we are

unable to fully discard the distinct characteristics that make up who we are given the context of the type of spaces our bodies occupy. However, it is this exact mode of being that can prevent us from being fully engaged with our immediate surrounds outside the confines of our safe Clark bubble. We are outsiders to this community whether we like it or not. The sooner we realize this as CDP students, the better able we are to unpack our prejudices and face our vulnerabilities, the longer we can make eye contact with strangers we pass on the side of the road. Why is that important? Because eye contact is one of the biggest indicators of our levels of comfort and if we are unable to look someone in the eye, the problem lies with us, not the other person. So when I walk through Main Street and avoided eye contact with strangers, I know I'm trying to confront my own fear and the disquieting voice in the back of my head that challenges me to confront my vulnerabilities and why I feel a certain way about a particular situation. I refer to this unwavering sense of doubt as the 'Main Street Madness'. I wanted to capture this example because it's part of a deeper complex phenomenon that happens when we are faced with the brutal truth about our positions in society and the unavoidable disparity that separates us from the very community that we want to 'engage with'. I am also distinguishing between those who experience Worcester as an outsider as compared to the students who are from Worcester but who also inhabit the 'Clark space'. I do not speak for those in the latter category. Hence, in Scene 1 where Mary speaks to the Stranger outside the gallery, there is an unspoken sovereignty between the interaction, where judgment and fear of 'the other' is absent or at least, minimal and unnoticeable. (This might be portrayed differently depending on the actors and how they choose to interpret the text but that is exactly the type of magic that can happen on stage,

where paradigms shift depending on the articulation and intonation of one singular word. I will also encourage students or readers of the text to perform this scene to capture the variations that will reflect the uniqueness of the individuals and their own inherent prejudices. How you perform the scene reflects what you think and what you think reflects your truth on the matter) An exact example of this is their reciprocity.

MARY
Where do you go?

STRANGER
Everywhere. Anywhere.

MARY
Hmm.

STRANGER
This whole place...it's all the same.

MARY
(Despondent. She is referring to something else) It really is.

Their easiness in conversation is apparent. They might not 'get' everything the other person is saying, but they don't let that stop them from having a real connection and conversation.

This 'easiness' in Scene 1 is contrasted in Scene 8 where the city officials interact with the waitress in an extremely demeaning manner without being aware of how incredibly rude they were being. Again, this lack of self-awareness is what keeps us from making real connections with people. They assume superiority in the context when power relations are blindingly apparent and ultimately reinforce the tension that exists between the two parties. This tension is an understanding of inherent privilege that comes with any

form of service exchange or transaction. The exchange between waitress and patron can either reinforce false ideas of power, or aim to create new narratives and relationships that can be beneficial for everyone in the long term. In Scene 8 when 'Jack', the city official speaks to Rosa in a demeaning way, he is stripping power away from her. The stage directions also indicate his patronizing manner in which he interacts with her when "[Jack] signals for her to come over with his fingers" The act of using one's fingers to call someone over is extremely belittling. The irony of the situation becomes apparent when we learn that Jack works in the realm of Community Development yet fails to understand that he is furthering the exact disparity that he is trying to ameliorate. This scene shows us that regardless of how much we know, or our positions in society and seemingly important roles that we hold in the various aspects of our lives, if we are dismissive to another human being in *any* context, the work will be tainted because our actions would be a reflection of who we are as individuals. So, be nice to everyone. But not because you have to be, but because every human deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.

Another instance that sheds light on the patronizing manner in which the working poor get treated occurs in Scene 15 between Rosa, and her rich employer, Ms. Betty. Again, the lack of awareness and selfishness from those with 'more power' furthers the disparity between those who serve them. Intentions aside, Ms. Betty's condescending tone suggests that Rosa should be honored that she invited Layla to her house, as it would be "be a nice experience for [Layla]!" insinuating that simply going to a 'rich house' is something that they aren't used to and should therefore be excited about having the chance to experience

something that they don't have. Ms. Betty is the epitome of the white savior with 'good intentions' but who actually causes more harm than good by simply being oblivious to Rosa's situation. This scene was written from my own personal experience with a woman who I worked for. I took care of her children and cleaned her house and ran her errands but ultimately, I soon found out that I was just another commodity to her and completely replaceable. And so I quit. But in that act of quitting I understood that I was only able to do that because my situation allowed for me to do so—I did not have a younger child who I had to care for. My privileged situation allowed for me to quit, unlike Rosa, who has to stay and endure that type of humiliation so that she can provide for her family. This interaction is important to understand because it brings up the nasty underwhelming experiences that we might have been a part of, one way or another. This scene also shows us that our intentions do not matter. Even if Ms. Betty was 'coming from a good place', she still came across as denigrating and Ms. Betty was still made to feel inferior. In the context of Community Development, it is our job and responsibility to 'check ourselves' and figure out where our hidden prejudices fester and how we can work through them. Hopefully as we continue our journey as people, regardless of what industry we choose to venture into, that we will hold ourselves accountable for what gets said and what we let slip away. Ultimately, it is our decision in how we handle situations and the type of relationships that we grow into with the people around us.

These are only mere examples of the verbal and non-verbal instances that casts a shadow on the ethereal moments that (I am assuming, and in part, hoping) happens to all people. Hence, I am looking to explore how community development can be 'learned'

through these experiences by the act of capturing dialogue and the transient moments that pass too quickly for us to define or name them.

In other words, can theatre—sprouting from the roots of playwriting as a form of community development practice, capture and present a different view on society and how we learn Community Development? I believe that playwriting serves as a more accessible platform that is able to capture the humanity of people while keeping a critical eye on the social injustice that is so deeply woven into the very fabric of our existence. As Julia Cameron states, “[t]he act of making art exposes a society to itself. Art brings things to light. It illuminates us. It sheds light on our lingering darkness. It casts a beam into the heart of our own darkness and says, “See?” (The Artist’s Way, 67). Theatre as an art-form, is therefore an important tool for teaching and learning Community Development. It is intrinsically political and extremely transformational to those who read and attend theatre shows and who practice theatre. In *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Augusto Boal, writes in the Foreword that,

...theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them. Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error—and this is a political attitude...[t]heater is a weapon. A very efficient weapon. For this reason one must fight for it. For this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilize it as a tool for domination. In so doing, they change the very concept of what “theatre” is. But the theatre

can also be a weapon for liberation. For that, it is necessary to create appropriate theatrical forms. Change is imperative (Boal,x).

Likewise, Cuban-American avant-garde playwright, director, and activist, Marina Irene Fornés once said that “if you want to write a political play, you must first live the politics. After that, you can write a play about a rock, and I promise you, it will be political” (East LA Rep, Alfaro). Drawing from the ideas of Boal and Fornés, it is my hope that the play occupies the space that allows us to see the liberatory potential of community development. I am living my politics through the very essence of my art. I experience the world and its’ complexities by capturing dialogue that often goes unnoticed to illuminate the ever-changing ideas, assumptions, and the shifts in intellectual paradigms that have happened over the course of the past year in my life in Worcester, Massachusetts. This has also been a way for me to really challenge conventional ways of conducting research, questioning the very essence of how research is constituted, while making meaningful work that resonates with people beyond the field of community development.

Upon speaking and seeking advice from various working professionals and practitioners in the field of Community Development, I have learned that this form of research is unconventional due to its subjective nature. Hence, I understand that a large part of this process will face extreme scrutiny and criticism. However, the inherent subjectivity of the work will calls for a deeper analysis of these social issues that are brought up in *Worcester*. It is also with deliberate intention that I title this work as a semi-rhetorical question, aiming to capture the ever-changing discourses and ideologies that surround the very nature of Community Development. The title embodies a synergy of relentless curiosity

and an open-mindedness that is needed when conducting and practicing this type of work. I realized that through writing the play that there could not be a title that fully captures the nuances and complexities of the human experience.

The typography of the title is interesting because I was trying so hard to convey something in the title. From *What Do I Call This Play? To Worcester, To Worcester, MA, to Sidewalks*, I finally found something that fit the feel of my impression of Worcester. The parenthesis that sections off “Between the Streets” indicates the separation that Worcester faces; the parts of Worcester that have been kept away; clean, if you will. It’s protected in neat little brackets. Hence, the spacing of the sentence forces the reader to read it in two parts, which is how I see Worcester. Worcester is a lot more complex than two segments that do not intersect. But from the streets of Grafton to Plumly Village, to the mansions that are located down Park Ave, Worcester exists in sections that are apparent to anybody driving up from Main Street. That can be said for most cities. But this isn’t just ‘another city’ to me. This is a place that has allowed me to grow along side it in some of my most turbulent years, and for that Worcester will always remain a loyal friend who will welcome me back in with delicious food and familiar faces. And it is because I love this place so much that I wish for it to grow and flourish in all aspects, especially for those who call Worcester home permanently. And this is why I have chosen to write about Worcester in a way that reflects my real thoughts on it, to be critical in a loving way. From my observations, to conversations, to long walks around the neighborhood, to working and going to school here for 6 years, this is how I see my Worcester. My hope is that you will start to see Worcester for all it’s grub and glory, and to be curious about a place that is so curious. However, it is this section on

Main Street that inspired me to write this. While driving to work I was caught in traffic and on my right, school children were running off the bus, I recognized one my students and watched him walk into Tedeschi with some other boys. I watched young children get off the bus and walk home by themselves. I watched adults on their phones, expressionless, standing around on street corners and then on my left I saw Clark. There were students cycling around campus with their Jansport bag packs and their crop tops and the freebees and the iced coffees and I realized that I was between two spaces, literally. This separation was then very painfully evident. I was sitting in my car. I had a car. I had these things, I go to this school! Yet I see unhappiness, a type of unhappiness that gets tossed around as an idea in class. I do not use the term ‘tossed’ around to imply insignificance of the action, rather, as a reflection of my growing critiques for how I saw community development at Clark during my time here.

As I was writing this I also started to understand how important empathy was. I also learned the importance of love and how necessary it was to love the people we work with, who we go to class with, even those who remain strangers to us. And I wouldn't say that I'm the friendliest person. I have terrible road rage and sometime I walk up the back of my stairs to avoid saying hi to my neighbors. I think human beings are funny that way. So the least we can do is be authentic about it. Be real about it. Be honest and confront our insecurities and vulnerabilities in class and outside it. Because what I've learned is this—if you can't get along with your classmates, or at least try to understand where they come from, then doing Community Development work will be very difficult because we haven't confronted the

issues without ourselves. It starts with ourselves, and then learning to be curious about people and places, and then starting to love those people and places. And then being okay with those people and places not bring curious or loving us back. I hope that this paper will illustrate dimensions of Community Development that are not mentioned in the curriculum while illuminating the nuances and meanings that are critical to our understanding but are difficult to communicate in traditional forms of learning about Community Development.

Limitations

Some limitations of the primary data source would include subjectivity and implicit biases. There is also the ethical issue of taking people's words and creating a narrative that is not mine. However, as a playwright, it is imperative that I stay open to all conversations and exchanges and stay as honest as possible. While recognizing that I do have an agenda, it is still important to remain open to other ideas and methodologies that I might be exploring as I continue this project.

Discussion Questions and Exercises

1. What stuck out to you the most when reading this? Why?
2. What has been your experience living in Worcester? What has formed those experiences?
3. Write about a time when you were afraid. Be vulnerable. Share that story with someone in the class.
4. Writing this play was my output, the only way I could make sense of things. What's your output?
5. Write a letter to someone who needs it. Give it to them.

6. If writing is not your forte, how else can practitioners express their thoughts and ideas?
7. Refer back to the top of page 9: But how feasible is it to expect one to be just as objective in the classroom as when they are interacting with real human lives outside of the institution? Why are we being taught to accept only a handful of procedures used to collect data when the actual lived experiences of an individual and community is so varied, so complex, so nuanced? What aspects of our learning about Community Development is omitted when traditional education is the only way that we are being taught?

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