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Samuel Nelson Williamson Blake

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**The Thesis Committee for Samuel Nelson Williamson Blake
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:**

**(Re)Building Grandmother's House: The Work of Queer Youth
Theatre Facilitators, Their Goals, Methods, and Practice**

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Paul Bonin-Rodriguez

Megan Alrutz

Kristen Hogan

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Samuel Nelson Williamson Blake, B.A.

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Dedication

For my Grandmother, Merle Williamson

&

For all queer youth, dreaming up queer tomorrows

You are fabulous creatures, each and every one

And for all those who dream with them

The Great Work Continues

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Abstract

(Re)Building Grandmother's House: The Work of Queer Youth Theatre Facilitators, Their Goals, Methods, and Practice

Samuel Nelson Williamson Blake, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Paul Bonin-Rodriguez

This qualitative study explores the work queer youth theatre facilitators through an assessment of the goals they hold for their work, the methods they employ, and the practice that results. Beginning with the premise that queer youth theatre (QYT) is an applied theatre practice which seeks to empower queer youth by engaging them in performance, this study investigates the role of adult facilitators in this work. Through conducting and analyzing a qualitative survey of thirteen QYT facilitators and interviews of a further four facilitators, I identify four foundational goals and five common methods QYT facilitators employ in their work. I then consider these goals and methods through an example of practice by engaging in a descriptive analysis of a QYT performance. Throughout this thesis, I employ theories from performance and queer studies, applied theatre, and critical pedagogy as a frame for my assessment of QYT facilitators' work. This helps situate the work of QYT within and between these disciplines demonstrating how QYT is informed, and thus informs, understandings of all three. Using José Muñoz's theorization of queer performatives as potential sites of utopian imminence, I argue that

QYT provides queer youth with the space of tools of performance through which they imagine futures for themselves and by enacting those futures create them in the present.

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Chapter 1: Laying a Foundation

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future...We must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.

—José Esteban Muñoz

There were no mirrors in my Nana's house, no mirrors in my Nana's house.

—Ysaye M. Barnwell, *Sweet Honey in the Rock*

MY SKIRT: AN INTRODUCTION

When I was six, I asked my grandmother to make me a skirt—and she did. I performed in my skirt. I wore my skirt when my grandmother and I played store, or other games of make-believe, when the characters I enacted in these games were, in my mind, women. Vividly, I remember discovering my grandmother's clip-on earrings and adding them to my ensemble. Enacting characters was not a requirement for me to wear my skirt, and I could often be found in it while dancing in my grandmother's living room. The wearing of my skirt was bound within my grandmother's house. Never once did she say that I was forbidden to wear my skirt outside, but somehow, consciously or unconsciously, I was aware that the permissive space that was her house—a space of imagination and possibility, a space of performance—ended at her doorway; aware that outside there existed a different set of rules, rules not governed by her love and acceptance. Over the years my skirt, and my grandmother's house in which I wore it,

have taken on symbolic meaning for me, symbols of permission and unconditional love, symbols that have become entwined with my beliefs about the power and potential of performance. As I grew older and began to understand and name my identity as a gay man, I carried the permissive space my grandmother created with me, internalizing her home, the acceptance that emanated from it, and the performative imaginings it enabled.

Through her gift of my skirt, and my performance while wearing it, my grandmother and I dreamed of new ways of being in the world, and thus, even if only for a moment and even if only in her house, created a new world (Muñoz *Cruising* 1). By naming these acts of imaginative world building as performance I am suggesting that they involved a doing *for* and a making *with* that move them outside the realm of daydream or solitary fantasy. Even if my audience was only my grandmother, I performed for her in my skirt and she participated as both witness and co-collaborator, allowing us to collectively imagine together. This was not necessarily a conscious act; I was, after all, only six. Yet my grandmother's gift of making me a skirt, of demonstrating love, openness, and acceptance, encouraged me to imagine different possible ways of being in the world, different ways of imagining myself in the world. I turn to the eminent and tragically departed performance scholar, José Muñoz here because his theorization of queer utopian performatives¹ in *Cruising Utopia* are deeply relevant to this thesis and to the story of my skirt. Illustrated by the quote that opens this chapter, Muñoz argues that a

¹ *Utopian Performatives* is a term coined by Jill Dolan, another eminent performance scholar influential both to Muñoz and to this thesis. In *Utopian in Performance*, Dolan defines utopian performatives as “small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense” (5).

conceptual value of queer or queerness lies not within an idea of queer as a preexisting state, but as the provenance of futurity, and hope—as a something to work towards, a promise of a then and there better than the here and now. For Muñoz, queer is a utopian ideality, knowable through moments in the past and glimpsable in the present through moments of performance, in which our striving for queer(ness) can orient us towards a brighter future enacted in the present. My skirt represents a moment where the confines of “the devastating logic of the world of the here and now” was ruptured and the horizon of a possible future was pierced, allowing that future to live in the present (Muñoz *Cruising* 12). Together, my grandmother and I imagined a queer future.

This thesis works to outline and define a fluid group of performance practices that have been termed queer youth theatre by explicating and theorizing on the role of adult facilitators within this form. Queer youth theatre (QYT) can be considered an applied theatre practice² with the goal of engaging and empowering queer youth through performance. This seemingly simple definition of QYT is important but is one I explore and refine throughout this thesis, hoping to achieve a more nuanced and layered understanding of QYT through the lens of facilitator practice. I open with the story of my skirt to position my understanding and conceptualization of the work of queer youth theatre, namely as a means through which queer youth are imagining queer futures—their futures. This story also frames my theorization of QYT facilitation, like my Grandmother did for me, I suggest facilitators offer performance to queer youth as means to imagine

² A definition of applied theatre is offered in this chapter’s section, “What’s in a Name?: Queer - Youth – Theatre.”

and share their futures. QYT is a relatively new practice and limited academic literature exists on the subject thus far. As such, there are many unexplored avenues of inquiry through which one might better conceptualize and theorize the work of QYT. This inquiry focuses on QYT facilitation to understand how facilitators' work with QYT participants to create performances that center the lives and experiences of queer youth.

Throughout this thesis, I position myself as researcher-advocate of the work of QYT facilitation to assert that QYT facilitators are creating spaces and offering tools that enable youth participants to engage in identity exploration/affirmation and community building, thereby imagining futures for themselves through performance. By employing a qualitative survey and interview process, I assess the goals, methods, and practice of QYT facilitation. Rather than prescribe best practices, the intent of this inquiry is to explicate and theorize upon the interconnected relationships between the goals QYT facilitators' have for their work, the methods they employ and the QYT practices that emerge. If the motivations that drive a facilitator's work determine their methods and practice, I ask how differences and similarities between those motivations inform the approach to and ethos of QYT? How do these similarities and differences signal distinct notions of what QYT is, and can be? And, how do facilitators' goals and expectations meet, mingle, and make room for their queer youth participants' own hopes and desires for the work?

To frame my assessment of and advocacy for QYT facilitation, I theorize that, through their work, facilitators offer queer youth precisely what my grandmother offered me—a skirt and a house, a costume and a stage—by which I mean tools to rehearse

identity and a space in which to feel safe performing, thereby communally proclaiming, their identities. I argue that this identity proclamation and community building by queer youth through performance is an act of resistance to being externally defined by heteronormative and homonormative systemic power structures. Borrowing from José Muñoz, I name these acts of identity proclamation, community building, and subsequent empowerment, as queer utopian performative imaginings in which queer youth collaboratively create possible future worlds, enacting, and thus building, them momentarily in the present.

SURVEYING THE TERRAIN: A DESCRIPTION OF THIS PROJECT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Little academic attention has been paid to queer youth theatre. This presents a need and an opportunity of new understandings for both the emerging practice of QYT and for the fields of applied theatre, performance studies, and queer studies amidst which QYT is situated. When I first began researching QYT, out of both scholarly interest and preparation for my own practice as an emergent facilitator, I was dismayed at the scant literature available on the subject. Of the few studies I found, all were case studies of individual QYT programs, and only one attempted to draw connections between different practices. This endeavor is found in the final chapter of Sydney Monroe Williams' astute master's thesis in which he interviews three QYT facilitators so as to situate his own facilitation within a broader field of practice. Unfortunately, this handful of case studies represents almost the entirety of academic literature on QYT. While these studies are, overall, exceedingly useful for their in-depth exploration of individual queer youth

theatre projects, Williams' lone example of an attempt to step back and survey a broader terrain of QYT, underscores the need for more comprehensive research into the vibrant work found within the QYT movement.

I point here to what I perceive as a gap between a rich theatrical, pedagogic, queer practice and attention paid thus far by scholarly inquiry. My thesis aims to begin to amend this deficit. As a scholar/artist/activist, I position myself and this document as a bridge between the practice of QYT and critical academic inquiry. In *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*, scholar/practitioner Helen Nicholson, whose work in applied theatre inspires me and serves as crucial frame for this thesis, beautifully connects theatrical practice and critical theory, arguing:

Theory finds a point of connection between 'why' questions (such as why is drama important in educational and community contexts?) with 'how' questions (as in how do people structure and organize their practice?). At other times I [Nicholson] want to use the flexibility of practice to test out or illuminate theoretical ideas. (*Applied* 17)

Following Nicholson, in my effort to connect why and how questions in QYT, I attempt to link the anecdotes and examples of practice I have collected from facilitators with queer, performance, and pedagogic theory with the hope that new understandings may be forged. This thesis uses critical inquiry to place me on the threshold of my own QYT practice. Through a rigorous scholarly study of the practices and theories informing QYT, I hope to enlighten my own future facilitation. My belief in the value of QYT stems from my participation in theatre since an early age and my conviction that this participation

was instrumental in my ability to come out as gay at age fifteen and in the support I received from my drama inclined peers. As someone passionate about the work of QYT, and who values scholarly investigations into a range of theatrical practices, I believe that QYT can only benefit as a subject of rigorous scholarship and critical inquiry. Furthermore, situating QYT within and between the fields of performance studies, applied theatre, and queer studies not only provides a framework for this theatre practice but asks us to consider how QYT effects and shifts our knowledge of these three fields that it connects. The dearth of research on QYT signals a perilous blind spot in our understandings of, and connections between, the fields of performance, applied theatre and queer studies.

I employ both historical context and terminology to define the scope of this study. For this thesis, I define queer youth theatre as any program in the United States, whether autonomous or connected to a larger organization, that seeks to use theatre as a means to engage lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, pan/polysexual, or questioning youth. In this context, a facilitator is considered to be anyone organizing and running a theatre program specifically designed for queer youth. In 2012 the Pride Youth Theatre Alliance (PYTA) was founded as an umbrella organization for QYT companies with the goal of “providing emerging and established leaders in the field with resources and opportunities to exchange, collaborate, and learn” (“About”). To fulfill this mission PYTA established an annual conference of QYT facilitators. To forge relationships and enlist allies to participate in this study, I attended the fourth annual PYTA conference in

August of 2015. The attendees of this conference serve as this study's survey population and the population from which I identified my interviewees.

I deploy a descriptive, analytical, and theory-based interpretive frame to assess three specific interwoven aspects of QYT facilitation—*goals*, *methods*, and *practice*. In the list below I define each of these terms and offer key questions that guide my consideration of them:

- 1) Goals – The intended outcomes for queer youth that facilitators aspire to achieve in their work. My assessment of goals includes three guiding questions: What are the primary goals that facilitators identify for their QYT work? How do these goals inform the performance making methods used by facilitators and shape an ethos and ethic of QYT practice? How do these goals respond to the needs of queer youth?
- 2) Methods – The theatrical and pedagogic theories and techniques that are used in, and influence, a facilitator's work. To assess methods I ask the following: What are the common methods facilitators employ in their work? How, and to what extent, do facilitators' goals determine the methods they use? How do these methods position QYT within a broader field of theatre making with youth and participatory performance?
- 3) Practice – The process and performance structure of each facilitator's QYT program. In other words the shape of the program itself.

Questions that guide my assessment of practice include: How is the aesthetic form of practice a model of a facilitator's goals? How do facilitator practices incorporate and center queer youth? What practices are common among multiple QYT programs? What are the challenges facilitators face in their practice?

Identifying these three elements of QYT facilitation as a site of inquiry allows me to draw connections and distinctions between multiple facilitators' work within the field. In doing so I take up broader questions of who and what is QYT for? How does it center and amplify the experiences of queer youth? How do facilitators work towards an ethical practice? Through these questions, rather than prescribing a rigid definition of what QYT is, I work to sketch a possible picture of what QYT might and can be.

DRAFTING A BLUEPRINT: A METHODOLOGY

The methodology developed for this study corresponds with two concomitant goals I hold for it; one, that it engages with as many QYT facilitators as possible about their work, and two, that I engage QYT facilitators in substantive conversations about their work. The former goal is important because I am determined that this study attempt to survey a broader field of QYT practice. The latter goal is crucial because I want to privilege and engage with the stories and experiences of QYT facilitators, mirroring what I believe is a cornerstone of their practice—centering the stories and experiences of queer youth. Initially these goals seemed somewhat at odds, the first calling for breadth the second for depth while I desired both. Thanks to the ideas and feedback generated during

my studies in Kathryn Dawson's course Pre-Thesis: Research and Practice, I found a way to unite both goals through employing both a qualitative survey and qualitative interviews of QYT facilitators.

The first component of this study was a qualitative survey which was taken by thirteen QYT facilitators. I generated the survey questions based on this study's focus on the goals, methods and practice of QYT facilitation with the guiding questions for each of these terms outlined above serving as the basis for question creation. My colleagues in Katie Dawson's Pre-Thesis course vetted the first draft of survey questions through a process of critical reflection. Classmates were administered the survey and instead of responding to the questions asked, wrote their initial reaction to the question posed, e.g. if they were confused, uncomfortable, excited, etc. This process was vital to strengthening the survey, preparing for public distribution. A facsimile of the administered survey is included in Appendix B of this document.

The survey was designed to invite QYT facilitators to outline their work by responding to a series of mostly open-ended questions, requiring written responses, with the intent of prompting qualitative reflections from a broad number of QYT facilitators. Responses were not limited by line or word count with the intention that respondents could determine their level of engagement. The survey can be subdivided into two question categories. The majority of questions focused on facilitators' work within QYT, while the smaller subset of questions focused on facilitators' personal information and stories. The aim of this was to acknowledge survey respondents individuality while still collecting meaningful data, ideally allowing similarities and differences of practice to

emerge without respondents feeling like they were reduced to statistics about their practice. This survey method allowed for both breadth of respondents and depth of responses, fulfilling my goals for the study.

The survey was built and administered March 15th – April 1st, 2016 through UT's survey software Qualtrics. Thanks to the generosity of Peter Meacham, the Pride Youth Theatre Alliance's executive director, the survey was distributed through their QYT facilitator mailing list. The email contained an appeal to forward the survey to any QYT facilitator who might be interested in taking it. Additionally, a personal appeal to take the survey was sent to thirty facilitators who attended the 2015 PYTA conference.

Four interviews comprise the second component of this study allowing for an in depth conversation with four facilitator's about their work in QYT. The intent of the interview process was to allow facilitators to discuss what about their work is meaningful and important for themselves. In this way the survey and interview components of the study complement and support one another. The surveys allowed me to target specific questions I believe are germane to the practice of QYT, while the interviews allowed facilitators to guide a discussion towards what they consider the most important aspects of their work. The interview approach was adapted from the process outlined in I.E. Seidman's *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. In describing what he calls, "phenomenological interviewing," Seidman argues its aim is "to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study" (9). Both his method and the interview techniques advanced within it were instrumental for developing and executing my interviews. Sideman advocates for a three-interview process for each

interviewee, however I modified this to one interviews per study participant. Each interview lasted about one hour in length. While I used a set of prewritten questions based off the survey for each interview as a guide, the interviews were intended to be conversational in nature allowing myself as researcher to follow up in the moment to something said by the interviewee. Thus the interviews were allowed to diverge from the survey in productive ways.

Upon the close of the survey period, and completion and transcription of the interviews, both study components were subjected to a coding process based on recommendations outlined in John W. Creswell's instructive manual *Research Design*. Survey and interview responses were read through carefully to identify recurring themes, specifically those pertinent to the goals, methods, and practice of QYT facilitation, and any questions that arise. With key themes identified data was reread to code for these themes.

This study's dual approach is designed to allow for an in-depth investigation into the intentions and processes of QYT facilitators, while also ensuring a sample size of the broadest possible range of facilitators. Ideally the form of this study enables me to showcase the words of individual facilitators of QYT while also allowing me to draw broader conclusions about the practice of using theatre to engage queer youth. While this study is not an ethnography, I am guided by D. Soyini Madison's tenets of ethical practice when a researcher is entrusted with the stories of others. In the opening pages of *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* she notes the extreme care that must be taken "when you [the researcher] stand as the transmitter of information and the

skilled interpreter in both presenting and representing the lives and stories of others whom you have come to know and who have given you permission to reveal their stories” (4). Madison goes on to argue how *critical* ethnography is the practice of advocacy on behalf of the community being represented in a given study. By understanding QYT facilitators as a community into which I have been invited and by adhering to Madison’s ethical principals of critique, I position my research and myself as advocates for QYT facilitators and their work.

STAKES IN THE GROUND: QUEER - YOUTH - THEATRE OR WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Names have power. Naming can be an assertion of identification, an act of affinity, or a marking of difference. The way we name reveals cultural contexts and implies a system of values. The act or process of naming often results from, and can illuminate, inequitable power structures. The word *queer* is a perfect example. Ranging in early usage from describing something odd or strange to that which is worthless and contemptible, queer gets applied to a group of people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries whose sexuality and gender do not conform to societal norms. Queer functions as a derogatory term until its reclamation by the LGBTQIAP+ community. The history of this naming represents an exercising of power, an imposing of values, by a majority population onto a minority deemed aberrant. The reclamation and transformation of that name into an identity-affirming label marks an act of resistance by LGBTQIAP+ identified folk to being externally defined. As I work through several key terms in this section, this story is a reminder of the importance of names, and the great care I must take

in naming. I unpack the name *queer youth theatre* by examining each of the individual words that make up that term. By delineating both my understanding and my employment of the terms queer, youth, and (applied) theatre, I hope to clarify how their assemblage functions to describe the practice of queer youth theatre. This provides a framework for conceptualizing the practice of QYT and plants my ideological stake in the ground of the aesthetic and theoretical landscape of QYT. In so doing, I participate in an ongoing dialogue of what this practice entails and hope to spark further imagining of what QYT is and might be.

I use the term *queer* throughout this document to refer collectively to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, pan/polysexual (LGBTQIAP+) community.³ My choice to use queer is multifold. First, and most importantly, practitioners and participants of queer youth theatre have adopted this term to define themselves and their theatrical work. To honor this choice, I use the label that the practice has coalesced around. Second, *queer*, as a reclaimed slur, has come to encompass a certain political stance or relationship to dominant power structures, as well as a sexual orientation or gender identity. David Savran expounds on this stating:

Queer (as adjective or noun) functioned during the 1990s as a deeply utopian designation: a locus of refusal; an unbinding of psychic, sexual, and social energy; a destabilizing third term; a principle of radical democratization; a postmodernist

³ The LGBTQIAP+ acronym has gone through many permutations over the years and continues to grow as new terms become codified to describe various identities. This iteration of the acronym is the most inclusive I have seen, although occasionally an additional Q is included for “questioning”. I omit the repetitive letter here for the sake of concision and clarity, with the hope that a single Q can encompass both identities. The + is used to be inclusive of gender and sexual minorities not explicitly named within the acronym.

renovation of camp; an affront to the bipolar system of gender and sexuality; a way of transcending both assimilationist and anti-assimilationist politics; a privileged mode of subversion. (57, emphasis his)

Savran connects queer identity with a radical resistance to dominant heteronormative frameworks. Importantly, he historicizes the reclamation and adoption of *queer* as having utopian aspirations and roots. Jill Dolan sums up *queer* more concisely arguing, “to be queer is not who you are, it’s what you do, it’s your relation to dominant power, and your relation to marginality, as a place of empowerment” (*Geographies* 98). The relationship between queer identification and action that Dolan and Savran point to is why I self-identify as queer, and use it here to describe the practices, politics, and people bound up in this queer youth driven theatrical movement. Employing *queer* in this thesis marks my politics and what I generally believe are the politics and actions of QYT participants and facilitators. Considering if and how the work of queer youth theatre facilitators is a queer practice, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, is one of the many questions at the heart of this thesis.

As with any definition that seeks to offer a frame for an essentially unfixed notion, using queer can be problematic. My study does not seek to deepen that problem, but to deploy the open aspects of the term to illustrate the fluid nature of QYT. To do so effectively, I work here to explicate the complications with using the term *queer*. First, it is a term that not all LGBTQIAP+ identified persons have embraced. At the same time, I know of no totalizing term that carries the weight of universal appeal and agreement amongst such a diverse group. My greater concern is that the term *queer* potentially

subsumes and erases various identities within the LGBTQIAP+ community. White, cis, middle to upper class gay men, among whom I must include myself, have often swallowed resources, dominated political agendas, taken up space, and drowned out other queer voices, especially voices whose intersecting identities make them targets of additional oppression, such as queer people of color.⁴ The risk of using the term *queer* is that it comes to represent a singular perspective and identity, instead of the myriad of identifications that intersect with sexuality and gender and make up the LGBTQIAP+ spectrum. I hope, perhaps naively, that by remaining clear and specific about the different contexts in which the work of QYT can take place, and how the various intersecting identities of both participants and facilitators shape such work, I can avoid making the use of queer into an oppressive screen behind which multitudinous identities are obscured.

Like queer, *Youth* is a fluid term both generally and as it applies to QYT. Who is included in the category of youth is negotiable and constantly in flux. In this case, beginning with a dictionary definition offers some insight; the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines youth as: “the time when one is young; the early part or period of life; more specifically the period from puberty till the attainment of full growth, between childhood and adult age” (“Youth”). The *OED* usefully notes that youth is often used to refer to the age range commonly associated with adolescence and the teenage years up until “adulthood.” This is another fraught term, which demands the question: by what standard

⁴ Cisgender, or cis (the shortened form I use here), refers to an individual whose gender coincides with the gender assigned to that individual at birth.

are we measuring adulthood in the United States? Is it eighteen, the age one can vote? Twenty-one, the age one can drink? The first time one has sex? Once one has graduated from college? Once one begins a career? What if that career changes? If a youth is living on the street, or works full time to support a family, or is tried and sentenced as an adult before the age of eighteen, do these life experiences then “graduate” that individual to adulthood? There are times, at the age of thirty-one, where I still do not feel that I qualify as an adult. If adulthood is a category in constant negotiation then certainly youth is too. In her introduction to *The Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*, Johanna Wyn demonstrates that “childhood, youth (and adulthood) are fluid relationships that are given definition and meaning by their social, cultural, political, institutional, locational, governmental, and economic contexts” (5). Not only is youth a contextually dependent term, but its definition is often derived in relation to the concept of adult, more precisely, youth is *not* adult. Herein lies a problem with the classification of youth; since it is always not adult it is a minoritized conception. I am indebted to José Muñoz’s concept of minoritarian here. Muñoz “use[s] the term *minoritarian* to index citizen-subjects who, due to antagonism in the social such as race, class, [age], and sex, are debased within the majoritarian public sphere” (*Cruising* 56, emphasis his). Youth, as a minoritarian subject, has not only social but legal ramifications within the US, which we see in the designation of minor referring to anyone under the age of eighteen and the subsequent arrival at an “age of majority.” Thus, youth can be considered a minority not necessarily of population but a minority of conceptualization.

Queer youth must then be understood as doubly minoritized, often even more so when intersecting identities, such as race, ability, and socioeconomic status, are taken into account. It is important to keep in mind that just as youth remains an unfixed term, mutable by the specificities of place, time, and intersecting identity, so too is true of queer youth. Susan Driver expands on this in her introduction to the anthology *Queer Youth Cultures*; she notes that “assumptions about groups of youth as bounded, unified, and visible entities become questionable when considering intersectional and permeable identifications shaping sexual and gender variant youth affiliations” (20). Driver expertly problematizes totalizing claims made about queer youth by popular culture, media, and researchers alike, especially when those claims ignore the fluidity of queer youth identities in relation to other intersecting identities these youth may hold. Recognition of, and advocacy for, this fluidity is, I argue, a key component of QYT practice.

Youth remains an unfixed category in regards to QYT practice as well. There is no set age range of participation; each QYT company sets its own limits on participant age. For example, this list includes five QYT companies and their respective participant age ranges:

- About Face Theatre, Chicago, IL—ages 14–23
- Fierce: Rainbow Community Players, San Bernadino, CA—ages 12–22
- Youth Aware Educational Theatre, San Francisco—ages 14–20
- Q&A Troupe, Memphis—ages 14–21

- Outright Vermont, Burlington, VT—ages 13–22 (“Queer Youth Theaters”)

This list is by no means exhaustive but is fairly representative of the programs that make up the Pride Youth Theatre Alliance. From this list we can see a range of ages, the lowest being age twelve to the highest being age twenty-three. This list makes clear that there is no uniform agreement between programs as to who constitutes a youth. However, the age ranges listed all remain within close enough proximity of one another that we can glean an approximation of ages served by QYT programs. I have found no data that would help to further delineate served populations of youth within QYT practice. Thus I can offer no statistical data beyond age as to the demographics of QYT participants.

Continuing to unpack queer youth theatre as a term, I turn now to the last of the three words that make up this moniker. While *theatre* is a term that can encompass many different forms of performance, I have proposed that QYT falls under the term of *applied theatre*. Applied theatre (ADT)⁵ remains a term that is the subject of some debate and negotiation amongst scholars and practitioners and so it is important to define my use and understanding of this term here.

Applied theatre, as a term, “gained currency during the 1990s,” although certain practices that now fall under this term have much longer histories (Nicholson *Applied* 3). The origins of applied theatre have been well charted,⁶ however, the term itself and what

⁵ Also known as *applied drama*, *applied performance*, or by the acronym ADT (for applied drama/theatre). Nicholson argues distinctions between these terms are mostly semantic (*Applied* 5). I use applied theatre and ADT interchangeably.

⁶ Nicholson *Applied* 10-13, Prendergast and Saxton 3-11, Shaughnessy 15-31

it entails remains in flux. In “Applied Theatre: Problems and Possibilities”, Judith Ackroyd thinks through how to define the practice and/or field of applied theatre and what that means for the variety of theatre-based practices that potentially fall under this label, or “umbrella term” as she calls it (1). Ackroyd suggests that what links these relatively disparate practices is “an intentionality which all the various groups have in common. They share a belief in the power of the theatre form to address something beyond the form itself” (1). In other words, art not just for art’s sake, but art put to some purpose. Ackroyd readily acknowledges that, far from new, this is perhaps the dramatic form’s oldest use. Helen Nicholson expands upon Ackroyd stating, “The idea that theatre has the potential to address something ‘beyond the form itself’ suggests that applied theatre is primarily concerned with developing new possibilities for everyday living” (*Applied* 4). Applied theatre’s concern with “new possibilities for everyday living” is a large part of why I consider QYT to reside under the ADT umbrella.

But what does being under that umbrella mean? Again I stress that what constitutes ADT practice is not fixed. In *Applying Performance*, Nicola Shaughnessy proposes that there are “three core principles...which seem to be fundamental to definitions of applied theatre” (7). The first principle she suggests is “context”, meaning that ADT endeavors generally take place outside of typical theatre spaces and settings (7). She continues: “secondly, there is a sense of it [ADT] having a utilitarian purpose and, thirdly, it will involve an active engagement with its audience who are generally constituted as participants” (7). While I appreciate Shaughnessy’s efforts to identify

similarities across ADT practices, I find her first and third principles to be debatable and that QYT practices sometimes challenge one or both while still remaining applied theatre.

I agree with Helen Nicholson when she suggests:

Applied theatre is perhaps most helpfully regarded not as a separate academic discipline nor as a specific set of dramatic methods but as a discursive space—as a way of conceptualising and interpreting theatrical and cultural practices that are motivated by the desire to make a difference in the world” (*Applied* 20).

While it is no doubt useful to try to understand what unites and distinguishes various practices within ADT, the strength of the term *applied theatre* comes from its flexibility. It is not a term that adheres to a binary of applied or not applied, but rather as Ackroyd and Nicholson assert and illustrate, marks the intention of certain individuals and collectives using theatre to work toward making a difference.

These individuals, trying to make a difference, are whom I term *facilitators* in this thesis. Just as with each of the terms I have discussed above, *facilitation* can encompass numerous practices within ADT and by extension QYT. Within ADT, “there are a number of terms for those who work in theatre with communities⁷—teaching artist, director, co-creator, artistic assistant, Joker (Boal’s term)⁸ and so on” (Prendergast and Saxton 17). Taking my cue from Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton, I use facilitator to describe those working in QYT because it “seems to be the most common [term] and,

⁷ Theatre with communities or community-based theatre are terms closely related or sometimes synonymous with applied theatre.

⁸ Referring to Augusto Boal’s Forum Theatre, which he develops as a method in *Theater of the Oppressed*, a foundational text of applied theatre.

in terms of its original meaning (“to make easy”), the most appropriate” (17). The facilitator is generally the organizer and in some ways leader of an ADT workshop, process, or program. What Prendergast and Saxton point to by invoking facilitation’s original definition is that often facilitators are working with populations with potentially little to no theatrical experience. The facilitator is often, though not always, the person providing and leading the theatrically-based activities—the tools that are being applied. Because QYT practices are varied, the work of this thesis is to determine what commonalities can be drawn between facilitators’ practices across QYT and how distinctions amongst facilitators’ goals methods and practices can illuminate understanding of queer youth theatre.

Returning to the question that titles this section, I ask: what’s in a name? The union of these three terms—queer, youth, and (applied) theatre—is infinitely complex because each term brings questions involving power, politics, and values to the equation. As such, the name queer youth theatre implies the practices collected under this term to be equally complex and politically charged. Understood as I have defined them, these separate terms combine to describe a practice that privileges the voices and experiences of a multiplicity of intersecting minoritarian queer youth identities through acts of performance that intrinsically, whether implicitly or explicitly, have a radical opposition to, and desire to, dismantle dominant normative power structures. This is one possible definition of queer youth theatre, however, QYT would not be queer if it did not defy attempts to contain it within one all encompassing statement. As I endeavor to paint a possible picture of QYT in this study through examining those who facilitate it, I honor

the politics and power, the subversive potential, implicit in the name queer youth theatre by working to keep my boundaries porous, my margins smudged, and my definitions illuminative of potential but never totalizing. If this section has demonstrated anything, it is that each of the terms that make up *queer youth theatre facilitation* are mutable and subject to change based on the specificities of time, place, and the identities and cultural surrounds of those who engage with them. Rather than impose limits through rigid definitions of what QYT *is*, my intent in this thesis, borrowing from Helen Nicholson, is to “raise questions about what it might be *for*” and how facilitators participate in that imagining (*Applied* 20).

MEETING THE NEIGHBORS: FOLKS ON THE BLOCK, A REVIEW OF LITERATURE PART 1

Two strands of academic literature guide my research and subdivide the following review. The first, taken up in this section, is the scholarship written specifically on QYT. The second, addressed in the section below, is scholarship which serves as a frame for this study. I like to collectively think of these scholarly works, and the authors who penned them, as my neighbors. If this thesis is a house, I am building it on the fairly quiet street of QYT scholarship. I say quiet because there aren't many other houses on this street, but don't get me wrong this street is *fabulous*! Glitter, sequins, plaid, paisley velour—I digress; by fabulous I mean the scholarship built on this street has been mostly excellent. Consisting almost entirely of case studies, these scholar-neighbors have richly illustrated specific QYT programs that reside within the neighborhood of queer youth theatre. When read together these case-studies begin to outline a possible shape of QYT

practice and the facilitator's role within it. Reviewing them briefly here positions these scholars as interlocutors of this study, neighbors from whom I borrow and build upon, and further demonstrates an opportunity for this study to place these works in conversation, a house on the street of QYT scholarship straining for a view of the whole neighborhood.

I credit the journalist and cultural critic, Randy Gener, for providing the earliest description I have found of a QYT performance in scholarly literature.⁹ Gener's "The Kids Stay in the Picture, or, Toward a New Queer Theater" (2002) is a brief essay, which highlights the work of School's OUT, a New York based program in the late 1990's which engaged queer teens in devising individual performance art pieces based on personal narratives. Particularly noteworthy about Gener's essay, beyond its early date, is that he suggests the work of School's OUT is above all "about fostering queer futures" (260). This assertion by Gener links QYT to the work of imagining a queer future, an assertion I take up, expand upon, and place in conversation with José Muñoz's theory of queer utopian performance.

The majority of scholarship on and around QYT employs case studies centered on specific QYT programs. Two such dissertations are Erica Rosenfeld Halverson's, *Telling, Adapting, and Performing Personal Stories: Understanding Identity Development and Literacy Learning for Stigmatized Youth* (2005), and Peter Rydberg's *Proud Theater: A Queer Youth Performance Model* (2012). Halverson offers a focused study of About Face

⁹ By noting this I do not suggest that the program Gener describes was the earliest QYT program. Chicago's About Face Youth Theatre dates to 1994 and in Boston The Theatre Offensive's True Color: OUT Youth Theatre dates to 1996.

Youth Theatre of Chicago while Rydberg provides a comprehensive case study of Madison Wisconsin's Proud Theater. In her work, Halverson argues that "organizations in which youth tell, adapt, and perform the stories of their own lives" provide a unique opportunity for queer youth to investigate and fashion "positive identities" in the face of stigmatization (3, 20). Similarly, Rydberg considers the beneficial effects of youth participation in a QYT program. Rydberg argues for Proud Theater to serve as both a potential model specifically for other QYT programs and a model of a successful arts activist organization in general. Notably, he also suggests that "Proud Theater [operates] as a site for intergenerational queer cultural transmission" (4). This assertion raises several underlying questions: who is doing this work? Can there be queer cultural transmission from a non-queer identified facilitator to a queer participant? Is such a transmission integral to the success of QYT? These questions, and Halverson's insights into how QYT can be a means by which queer youth tell their own stories are crucial concepts for this thesis and propel my inquiry forward.

Two master's theses follow this case study model, Jonathan Parker Jackson's *interACTionZ: Engaging LGBTQ+ Youth Using Theatre for Social Change* (2013), and Sydney Monroe Williams' *Queer Pedagogies: Performing Outside the Lines* (2014), which provocatively outline efforts to build QYT programs from the ground-up. Both Jackson and Williams chronicle their founding of QYT programs, providing two facilitator-based accounts of building QYT programs. While Jackson's documenting of the founding of interACTionZ and reflection upon the challenges and successes encountered are helpful, I cannot help but note and lament his lack of methodological or

theoretical framing for his interACTionZ project and thesis. Without these to anchor his report it is difficult to understand the intentions behind, and influences upon his work. In contrast Williams' thesis is rich with descriptive facilitator practice layered with theoretical inquiry. Williams' work not only offers an insightful, self-reflexive assessment of his own endeavors as a QYT facilitator but, by interviewing three other QYT facilitators, places his practice in dialogue with others in the field. These interviews have been crucial in clarifying my own thinking about the need to include interviews in my own thesis and provide an excellent template for how to interview QYT facilitators about their work.

The Home Project is a QYT performance chronicled by the project's facilitator, Megan Carney, in "Creating a Forum: LGBTQ Youth and *The Home Project* in Chicago" (2008). Based in Chicago, Carney writes of a difficult process, navigating youth disappearing with no way to contact them, trying to allow the youth to be decision makers but worrying about deadlines, not to mention the emotionally turbulent nature of the work. Her reflections as a QYT facilitator are helpful and comprise the only written description in the literature of a project specifically working with queer homeless youth. Unfortunately, *The Home Project* appears to have been a singular event, which raises the question of how many one-time projects and performances for queer youth occur and go unreported.

Two articles are noteworthy in this review as both offer powerful indicators of the potential for personal narrative-based performance to effect positive change in the lives of queer youth. In 2014, Laura Wernick, Alex Kulick, and Michael Woodford published,

“How Theatre Within a Transformative Organizing Framework Cultivates Individual and Collective Empowerment Among LGBTQ Youth” in the *Journal of Community Psychology*. The authors’ describe the methods used by Gayrilla, a QYT program in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to create a public performance. The article relies heavily on the words of youth participants to illustrate their theatre making “process of constructively claiming the experience of marginalization and using the expression of collective oppression as a means to create change” (Wernick, Kulick, Woodford). The authors summarize their findings stating “theatre was a crucial intervention that served to create community, build critical consciousness, and effect change, which ultimately developed both youth’s individual and collective empowerment” (Wernick, Kulick, Woodford).

While not specifically writing about QYT, Susan Salzburg’s and Tamara Davis’ article, “Co-Authoring Gender-Queer Youth Identities: Discursive Tellings and Retellings” (2010) is a profound study on the power of language and the empowerment that comes from self-naming. The article is a “retelling” and analysis of conversations between ten queer youth about their creation of new language to define their identities. The authors also observe that these youth are “shifting paradigms through social talk that challenges traditional constructs” (Saltzburg and Davis). Overall, Saltzburg and Davis offer a compelling example of how queer, specifically gender-queer, youth are empowering themselves to define their own identities, with their own created language thereby eschewing heteronormative definitions and stereotypes. While there was no performance component to this youth group’s social dialogue, the importance of narrative sharing clearly expressed by the youth and the community this fostered among them, is

directly relevant to my research.

It is fitting to conclude this first section of my literature review with the work of applied theatre scholar and practitioner Megan Alrutz because her monograph *Digital Storytelling, Applied Theatre, & Youth: Performing Possibility* so masterfully bridges case studies of her own practice with various theoretical frameworks through which she analyses her work. Alrutz defines the intentions of her book as “to give attention to the generative intersections of applied theatre and digital storytelling and explore how particular live and mediated performance practices create new sites of possibility around youth participation and representation” (4). The potentials Alrutz illuminates for applied theatre practices to center and amplify youth stories and experiences offer the best theorization of the relationship between youth and ADT I have encountered in the literature. This alone would merit inclusion of her work in my study, however, among the many case studies Alrutz employs of her own practice is her work on Inside OUT, a queer youth centered project in which participants created digital stories from their personal experience. Alrutz and her co-facilitators’ employed “theatre and performance pedagogies, as well as digital media examples and activities, as tools for reflecting on personal experiences,” culminating in a public sharing of the digital performance pieces created by the youth participants (60). While not named as such in her work, I would argue that Alrutz’s Inside OUT project was a form of queer youth theatre. This places her work in conversation with this study in two key ways. First, her description of Inside OUT serves as another case study of a QYT project, one in which the facilitator offers a descriptive and nuanced critical reflection of her practice. Second, the theoretical frames

Alrutz applies to both *Inside OUT* and the intersections of applied theatre, digital storytelling, and youth help shape my own ideas and beliefs about the potential power in centering queer youth experiences through performance.

Alrutz links the participation of youth in applied theatre and digital storytelling with possibility. From the first sentence in her book possibility is allied with futurity. She later considers “how this performance work [of youth] can and will transgress time, and ultimately reflect and (re)constitute the relationship between youth and society” (17). Like so many of the scholars who help frame my ideas about QYT, Alrutz argues the potential of performance to pierce a temporal horizon, transporting us briefly from a here and now to a then and there. Performance allows youth to enact imagined futures for themselves creating possibilities in the present for a different tomorrow. Alrutz’s work bridges the two sections of this literature review as it occupies the space of both specific QYT case study and theoretical inquiry. As such, it is a text that both helps to paint a broader picture of QYT as all the literature reviewed in this section has done, and it is a text that helps frame my inquiry of QYT, which is the work of the following section.

MEETING THE NEIGHBORS: FRIENDS IN THE CITY, A REVIEW OF LITERATURE PART 2

To extend my earlier metaphor, if this thesis is a house, and that house stands in the neighborhood of QYT, then that neighborhood has multiple zip codes. If we were to place this neighborhood on a map we would see it resides both within and between several cities, including performance studies, applied theatre, queer studies, and critical pedagogy. These beautiful and complex cities, or scholarly disciplines, have boundaries

that are mercifully permeable enough to allow for QYT's coterminous inhabitation of them. Thus, like QYT, my thesis is situated within and between these disciplines and I draw upon each to weave an interdisciplinary theoretical lens through which to frame my inquiry on QYT facilitation. While I rely on numerous scholars and theorists in this thesis, the scholarship of three individuals—critical pedagogist Elizabeth Ellsworth, applied theatre practitioner and theorist Helen Nicholson, and queer and performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz—are instrumental in my conceptualization of QYT. These three academicians and their writings serve as guides or points of reference, friends if you will, to their respective disciplines. Moreover, their scholarship forms a foundation upon which I construct my own theories about facilitators and their work in QYT. This section works to highlight certain crucial concepts from their writings and begins the process of weaving them together through their application to QYT.

I begin with the utopian performative potential of queerness, which is not only fundamental to my conceptualization of QYT but to how I read and use the other two theories I principally engage with here. Central to the concept of queer utopian imaginings through performance is José Muñoz's work *Cruising Utopia*. In *Cruising Utopia* Muñoz uses the work of philosopher Ernst Bloch as a compass by which he navigates the possibilities of utopia(s) for queer folk. In fact, Muñoz argues queer does not currently exist, it is a concept that must be worked toward, a concept located in the horizon of the future and, as such, one infused with utopian potential. He argues that, "the present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and 'rational'

expectations” (*Cruising* 27). Utopia for Muñoz functions not as a specific, prescriptive idea of the future but as “an idealist mode of critique that reminds us there is something missing, that the present...is not enough” (*Cruising* 100). Critically to my project, Muñoz contests this future felt through a utopian critique is knowable through performance. He elaborates, “Certain performances of a queer citizenship contain what I call an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present” (*Cruising* 49). Importantly, Muñoz does not advocate dismissing the present but instead suggests, “the present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds” (*Cruising* 27). In other words, we, as minoritarian citizen-subjects¹⁰, can find traces of a queer past which points towards the possibility of a queer future, a future with boundless new potentialities of living with one another in the world, a future that can be felt and thus known in the present through performance.

Helen Nicholson also writes about horizons and the potential for applied theatre practices to disrupt them. Her writings on applied theatre form the second strand of theory that I take up in this thesis. The horizons Nicholson speaks of are mostly those that define the individual—the set of experiences and circumstances that make up one’s sense of self (*Applied* 66). However, Nicholson also suggests other types of horizons that applied theatre engages with and disrupts:

¹⁰ I am indebted to Muñoz for this term, which I borrow from *Cruising Utopia* throughout this thesis.

Applied theatre can make a contribution to building a more generous and multifaceted world by making a creative space in which fixed and inequitable oppositions between the local and the global, self and other, fiction and reality, identity and difference, human and non-human might be disrupted and challenged. (*Applied* 174)

Nicholson figures the power of applied theatre as residing within its potential for disrupting various horizons. Some applied theatre theorists have described this potential of applied theatre as the power of transformation.¹¹ Nicholson is wary of the implications of transformation, as am I. As an alternative, Nicholson uses Richard Schechner's notion of transportation to describe ADT's change-making potential because it confines the disruption of the status quo to the duration of the theatrical experience (*Applied* 15). The concept of transportation does not assume lasting change amongst viewers of, or participants in, the drama, yet still allows for the possibility. Or as Nicholson elegantly puts it: "Transportation is a durational process of becoming rather than being, about travelling into another world, often fictional, which offers both new ways of seeing and different ways of looking at the familiar" (*Applied* 15).

Muñoz also recognizes the power of transportation via performance, especially for minoritarian citizen-subjects. His understanding of transportation and its implications on minoritarian identity are so central to this thesis that they bear quoting at length:

Minoritarian performance—performances both theatrical and quotidian—
transports us across symbolic space, inserting us in a coterminous time when we

¹¹ See Philip Taylor's book *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community*.

witness new formations within the present and the future. The coterminous temporality of such performance exists within the future and the present, surpassing regulation to one temporality (the present) and insisting on the minoritarian subject's status as world-historical entity. The stage and the street...are venues for performances that allow the spectator access to minoritarian lifeworlds that exist, importantly and dialectically, within the future and the present...These performances are thus outposts of an actually existing queer future existing in the present. (*Cruising* 56)

I argue that queer youth theatre is imbued with this transportive potential. QYT as a minoritarian performative mode is rooted in the various histories of the queer youth whose narratives often comprise the drama. In performing the past and possibility of their lives, queer youth performers' imagine futures for themselves and through so doing insist on those futures' existence. Through performance we are transported to imaginings of QYT participants' futures, which thus exist conterminously with our present.

There are profound pedagogical implications to this assertion as well. Applied theatre is often allied with education, and many ADT practices have grown out of a pedagogic impulse.¹² While QYT's mission is not necessarily to teach, it is deeply bound up in notions of identity formation and exploration. As such, pedagogical theorist Elizabeth Ellsworth's writing on what she terms "the learning self" is the third strand of critical theory through which I conceptualize QYT. Ellsworth posits that identity

¹² Applied theatre has roots in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and various other progressive education philosophies (Nicholson *Applied* 11, Prentki and Preston 12-13).

formation is a lifelong process inexorably linked to learning—the learning self. For Ellsworth the learning self is the “assemblage of mind/brain/body” always in relation to and interacting with the “time and space of pedagogy” (4). She expounds on this further stating:

Learning never takes place in the absence of bodies, emotions, place, time, sound, image, self-experience, history. It always detours through memory, forgetting, desire, fear, pleasure, surprise, rewriting. And, because learning always takes place in relation, its detours take us up to and sometimes across the boundaries of habit, recognition, and the socially constructed identities within our selves. Learning takes us up to and across the boundaries between ourselves and others and through the place of culture and the time of history. (55)

In a pedagogic conceptualization of QYT horizons are approached and disrupted both temporally and interpersonally. Ellsworth’s idea of the learning self is that it is always in the making (always *becoming* as Nicholson would say) because we are always in relation to, and thus learning from, other people, places, and times. Hence, the potentiality of QYT is not simply that queer youth imagine a future for themselves through performance but that they do so in relation to one another. Performance becomes a vehicle through which queer youth communally access a cultural memory, embodied in the present, which envisions a queer future.

The insistence on the possibility of a future for queer youth through performance is radical. Radical because the “devastating logic of the present” tries to insist for many queer youth, especially trans youth and queer youth of color, that survival is not supposed

to occur, that a future is an impossibility; radical because queer youth refuse this logic. Through performance queer youth insist on the potential of a queer future in the present and thus QYT practices can be read as a radical opposition to the present's heteronormative logic. Moreover, queer youth performances bring these futures into existence.

MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

This thesis works from the premise outlined above. I write from a position that seeks to honor the voices of queer youth and the radical potential of the performances' they create. In turn, I write as an ally and aspirational QYT facilitator who through this study assess the goals, methods and practice of QYT facilitation. This thesis asks how facilitators of QYT, individuals who often control funding and programming to various degrees, work to create spaces and theatrical experiences that foster and support the imaginative power of their queer youth participants? How do facilitators conceive of their work with queer youth and the role they play in queer youth's lives? How does the intentionality of each facilitator's practice create spaces and provide tools of performance that enable the learning selves of both participant and facilitator to meet and imagine new ways of being in the world and thus different worlds? How do facilitators' beliefs in a future for queer youth—by necessity a queer future—help reaffirm queer youth's insistence on a future for themselves? These questions, along with those raised throughout this chapter, are what I take up in this thesis.

In this chapter I have positioned myself as both a scholar and emerging practitioner of QYT; my thesis advances this dually valenced role, functioning as both a rigorous inquiry into QYT facilitation and my own personal preparation, meditation, and guidebook as a QYT facilitator. Deeply connected to this synthesis is the metaphor of a house. Through the title of this thesis I have proposed that the work of QYT facilitators is akin to building a house, not just any house, but grandmother's house. The introduction to this chapter draws parallels between facilitators' work and the imaginative space and performative tools my grandmother offered me within her home. This analogy is my way into this work as scholar/practitioner, my positional understanding of both a theoretical concept of QYT facilitation and my own work as facilitator. While the sentimental impulse of this cannot be denied, I equate the work of QYT facilitators to my grandmother because when I read the theories of José Muñoz and search for discernable moments of a queer utopian past so that I might be (re)assured of the potentiality of a queer future I see my six-year-old self dancing in my skirt in my grandmother's living room. Not only do I maintain that we imagined queer futures, but through her love and the home it was built it became a reference point to glance back on—an assurance of the past that shines hope upon the future. That is the work of QYT facilitation. QYT provides spaces and offers tools for queer youth to imagine and build futures for themselves, spaces and tools that they carry with them so they can keep reaching for a queer future even when it seems so very far away.

Thus, like my position in this thesis the metaphor of the house is dually charged. I equate both the work of QYT and the work of this thesis to building a house. Rather than

mixing my metaphor, what I attempt to demonstrate is that this thesis is both process and product, it is both my study of QYT and my preparation for practice and as such the house I build here traces possibilities for both, aligning my hopes for my practice with those of QYT. I have in this chapter worked to survey the terrain, outline the blueprints, tour the neighborhood and lay the foundation for where this house stands. In chapter two I name and interrogate four goals and five methods indicated by the results of my survey and interviews of QYT facilitators. As the chapter title suggests, these goals and methods can be read together as structural walls of QYT; the intentions and ideologies that hold QYT up, that give it shape. I should note these are thin porous walls, they do not seek to cut QYT off from other practices but connect and define QYT in relation to them. In chapter three I do some “interior decorating” of this house by closely analyzing one QYT performance, and one interviewees description of how that performance was made, to enable a discussion of various elements of QYT practice. By the end of this study I hope to have offered a picture of what QYT might look like and what it might be used for, and so I conclude my thesis by imagining futures, the possible futures of QYT, my future as a practitioner of it, and, most importantly, the futures of queer youth which are so central to the heart of this work.

Chapter 2: Building a Structure

This type of theatre could also be called Theatre of the Third Space, and it would include members of any borderline community or non-community; it would include anyone who falls through the cracks of the cultural floorboards; it would include anyone who challenges a cultural binary; it would include anyone who is other. We could call it Freak Theater, or Other Theater, but I'm for calling it Queer Theater

...

My feeling is that today we need, as queer artists, to strengthen our outsider sensibility, keep it fluid enough to be inclusive of other groups, inflammatory enough to challenge and wear down the dominant ideology, and full of enough grace and humor to welcome with a laugh the inevitable challenges to our own rigidity.

–Kate Bornstein

MAPPING GEOGRAPHIES: A CALL FOR REFLEXIVE PRACTICE

I entered the main convention room, aptly named the Bluegrass Room, in the Hilton of downtown Lexington, Kentucky and was greeted by a scene of hugs, boisterous greetings between colleagues and friends, and general conversation. It was the first day of the 2015 Pride Youth Theatre Alliance (PYTA) annual conference where facilitators from all twenty-five member organizations of PYTA, youth participants, scholars, and general enthusiasts gather for a weekend to discuss and engage with queer youth theatre. The PYTA conference was initially conceived as a space where facilitators of QYT could share methods of creating theatre with young people and engage with various challenges that face the field. This remains the heart of the conference and so most conference

session and/or workshops highlight innovative tools or approaches to the work of QYT. PYTA conference 2015, the fourth annual, included workshops on drag, hip-hop theatre, story circles, adultism, aesthetic education, as well as sessions on recruitment and retention of youth participants, practicing QYT in the southern US, creating safe boundaries between facilitators and youth, and multiple sessions on strategic planning and fundraising. The conference is space where facilitators and other stakeholders in QYT gather exchange ideas over what QYT is, and can be. Additionally, PYTA conference 2015 was my introduction to most of the facilitators whose voices are highlighted in this study. As such, the conference seems an appropriate and useful introduction as I take up the topics of the goals and methods of QYT facilitators in this chapter. The following story in particular continues to linger with me as I think about the many challenges and possibilities in the work of facilitation.

Many applied theatre practices deploy a multitude of games and/or exercises, hoping to encourage participants to see topics in a different light, to open new lines of dialogue, and to spark critical reflection upon and engagement with oneself, one another, and the broader world. In this instance, the activity at hand was a sociometric exercise based on geography. This activity asks participants to embody their geography, mapping experiences of locale among a group so that, in theory, differences can be perceived and points of contact and understanding forged across an expanse. What follows is my memory of the activity that began the first full day of PYTA conference 2015.

The conference was called to order and it was announced that there were roughly fifty attendees, a near doubling in attendance from the prior year. After the general

welcome, announcements, and review of conference rules, we were invited to participate in a “getting to know you” activity, facilitated by two members of PYTA. The facilitators invited us into the half of the room not taken up by chairs and asked us to envision a map on the floor. They indicated compass directions for this map but nothing more and then asked us to go stand on the location that each of us identify as being from. For me this is a suburb of Detroit, Michigan, so I headed “north.” In an effort to navigate our invisible map, attendees began asking nearby neighbors where they were located (i.e. where they were standing). I quickly found someone standing in Ohio and dutifully stood north of this person and to the west of several New Yorkers. This put me close to a wall of the room with very little space north of me before hitting that wall. I became aware of an attendee hugging the wall near me and asked where she was standing. Canada, she replied, just north of Toronto. I moved slightly south to accommodate my northern neighbor; this put me almost next to my neighbor standing in Ohio.

Once we shared out with the entire group where we each were on our map we were given another prompt, this time to move to the place on the map where we currently live. I headed south toward where I thought Austin, Texas might be on this amorphous map of ours. I arrived at my approximation of Austin and conferred with those nearby to make sure I was in the “correct” place. It was at this point that conference attendee and interlocutor for this study, Magenta Davenport¹³, spoke up. She said something approximating, “Hey everyone, I just want us all to acknowledge the map we have

¹³ Pseudonyms have been used for interviewees throughout this study. I invited interviewees to create their own pseudonym and Magenta was the only one to take me up on the offer.

created and to point out that US-centrism is real and on display right here.” It was true. In this undefined space we had put the borders of the US right up to the walls of the room, which was admittedly small for this activity. We had left no room for other countries and the facilitators who had potentially been born in them and/or traveled from them. This meant we had, with our bodies and minds, created a map in which anyone not from the US had no space, no existence.

The third prompt came and we were asked to walk to a place on the map where we had learned something deeply important to us. I started to make my way east toward the United Kingdom, and realized in talking to folks near the eastern wall that they were standing on various parts of the east coast of the United States. I met a facilitator who also was trying to stand in Europe and so we exited the room and stood out in the hall. It was our attempt to visually demonstrate that there was no longer space for us on the map in the room. It was disheartening to observe that after Magenta had bravely spoken out to fifty peers about a perceived problem the group had not really worked to amend it. We were wrong not to try and fix our perceptions of this map we had imagined together, and I regret not being brave enough to add my voice in calling us to do so. However, also important is the way Magenta spoke out. While right to voice her observation, she offered no solution, or even an entry point through which the group might begin to tackle the problem together. Despite being a participant in that moment, she, like the majority of those in attendance, is a QYT facilitator. How does the role of facilitator demand that we find means to open up spaces of dialogue? How do we move beyond provocations towards solutions?

I open this chapter with this story to illustrate how deeply challenging the work of facilitation can be in QYT and applied theatre (ADT) more generally. Numerous factors were at play in this moment including space and time limitations; the high stakes of leading an exercise in front of peers, many of whom were strangers; and the blurry line between condemnation and productively voicing an issue. There were two facilitators leading us through this exercise, and as is often the case in ADT work things did not go entirely as they had planned. It can be extremely hard in the moment to know how to respond to an unplanned situation. As both a teacher and a novice ADT facilitator, I can attest to how an unplanned for comment or question from a student/participant can cause me to freeze. Rather than admonish, this story demonstrates an opportunity to grow our applied theatre practices and broaden our horizons. To borrow from the Kate Bornstein quote that begins this chapter, as artists and facilitators we must learn to recognize and amend with good humor the inevitable discovery of our own rigidity.

In *The Reflexive Teaching Artist*, Kathryn Dawson and Daniel Kelin theorize the profound importance on reflexivity in a facilitator's work.¹⁴ They note: "reflexive thought invites us to critically examine how beliefs and values, actions and attitudes, our very intuitions shape choice, influence collaborators and students, and significantly influence the results of our and our students' experiences" (30). The story above illustrates the ways in which a facilitator's reflexive practice is critical to their growth. Perhaps due to surprise, embarrassment, misunderstanding, or a host of other possible reasons, the facilitators did not stop to address Magenta's concerns. Likewise, in pointing out the

¹⁴As noted in Chapter 1, teaching-artist is another term for, and one often used by, ADT facilitators.

problem, Magenta did not encourage us to find a solution, perhaps due to her own embarrassment or frustration. Similarly still, my own concerns about having “outsider status” as one who hopes to but has not yet facilitated QYT and who was in attendance as a researcher of other people in the room led me to remain silent. Reflecting on these actions and the reasons behind them, and the systemic reasons why the group collectively imagined the map as we did, may create an intervention in our practice and how we negotiate such instances in the future. Dawson and Kelin’s call for reflexive practice chimes with Muñoz’s methodological approach to futurity, namely, “a backward glance that enacts a future vision” (*Cruising* 4). Reflection reminds us that the work of facilitation has always already begun; reflection allows us to chart a different course for the future. Leaving no room for reflection at the end of the mapping geographies activity left the work incomplete and deflated the exercises potential to make-meaning from the experience.

Recently, I had the opportunity to play this game again in a completely different context. The setup was similar, a group of us were in a room and we were invited by a facilitator to imagine that the floor of the room was a map. This time, however, we were also told this would be a silent activity. We were then invited, like at the PYTA conference, to go to the place on the map where we consider ourselves to be from. At this point a participant raised her hand and asked “which way is north?” To which the facilitator replied, “you decide what north is for you.” The combination of silence (not being able to compare where each of us were standing on the map) and an absence of compass direction allowed for a map that was completely personal. Every participant’s

map in that room was different, and yet they each transected the same space. In this version, we also developed gestures or movements to go with each location on our map and then shared our movements with another participant. Two by two we traversed each other's maps and learned a story about the importance of that place to that participant, without knowing where that place was, and without saying a word.

Michel de Certeau writes, “what the map cuts up, the story cuts across” (129). In the PYTA conference exercise described above, our map indeed not only cut up, but cut out. We unintentionally excised fellow participants by not making room for them on the map. In the second version of this activity the sharing of our stories through performance cut across the boundaries of our maps, allowing different geographies to exist together in the same space and time of the imagination. Dwight Conquergood argues that Certeau's statement “points to transgressive travel between two different domains of knowledge: one official, objective, and abstract—‘the map’; that other one practical, embodied, and popular—‘the story’” (311). Queer art, and by extension QYT, is often an attempt to subvert, transgress, and deprivilege the former of the two domains of knowledge Conquergood delineates because queer identities have so often been excluded from it—hidden in the closet of the archive, we are unmapped. The PYTA conference story above demonstrates how difficult the effort to deprivilege certain forms of knowledge can be, even in a majority queer space. It demonstrates a failure, but a failure that can be learned from. I balance it with the second story because it demonstrates how applied theatre can be an effective tool at disrupting the confines of our own locational, experiential, ideological horizons. ADT and QYT practices can privilege alternate epistemologies and

disrupt horizons, whether that horizon is a border on a map or the distant promise of a queer future. I maintain that this is what QYT facilitators struggle to do in their practice, even if it means sometimes failing, reflecting, and trying again.

The theme of reflection frames this chapter because reflection is what I endeavored to prompt through the qualitative survey and interview questions designed for this study. This chapter outlines four primary goals shared by QYT facilitators and demonstrates how these goals inform the methodologies QYT facilitators employ in their work. Through a coding process of my survey and interview results, I identify *social justice*, *community building*, *identity exploration/affirmation*, and *arts education/exposure* as the four principle goals of QYT facilitation. In this chapter I expand on each goal separately, putting facilitators' own words from survey responses in dialogue with my own theorization of how QYT serves as a medium through which queer youth imagine futures for themselves by enacting them in the present. Despite being considered individually, I demonstrate throughout how each goal is intricately enmeshed with the others, forming a foundation for QYT practice. Five methods—*applied theatre*, *Boal techniques*, *creative drama*, *youth theatre*, *devised theatre*—of QYT facilitation are also derived from survey and interview results. These methods, like the goals before them, are expounded upon individually and placed in dialogue with the goals QYT facilitators have for their work. Considering the methods most used by facilitators elucidates the various ADT and theatre-making methods in dialogue with QYT and how the methods facilitators use help them work towards their goals for QYT and queer youth. This allows for a productive assessment of how the motivations fueling a

facilitator's practice inform choices of which methodologies facilitators' routinely draw inspiration from and deploy in QYT. Concomitantly, I demonstrate how the goals facilitators' hold for QYT resist potential confines of methodological affinity, working to resist normative practices and infusing new possibilities into the methods of participatory theatre making geared toward youth.

GOALS: FOUNDATIONAL TOUCHSTONES

Through a comparative analysis of survey results and interview transcripts, four goals were identified as common to the majority of respondents' QYT work:

- Identity exploration and affirmation
- Community building
- Social justice/undoing oppression/collective liberation
- Arts education and exposure

By naming and expounding upon these four goals in this section, I offer a set of foundational touchstones for QYT. These goals offer critical insights into both the motivations that draw facilitators to QYT and the intentionality that guides their practice. This section puts the words of facilitators in dialogue with my own theoretical frames to explicate the importance of each goal to QYT and how they operate together to inform methods and practices that prompt youth performances of queer futurity. In chapter one I defined goals as the intended outcomes for queer youth that facilitators aspire to achieve in their QYT work. While this remains true, it is important to also allow for a more generalized understanding as well. In speaking with facilitators and reviewing my survey

results it is clear that their goals encompass both specific intended outcomes through participation, but also a more general hoped for result on the part of facilitators, unquantifiable changes facilitators hoped to see both in the youth and in the world. The intent of this section is twofold. First, by using respondents' words I hope to capture a sense of facilitators' perceptions on the consequences of their own work. Second, by framing those words, and the goals illuminated in them, within performance theory, queer theory, and critical pedagogy I work to propose a set of principles from these four goals that, while still fluid, helps define QYT as rooted in and situated between these three disciplines.

Identity Exploration and Affirmation

What I term identity exploration and affirmation is derived from the dual considerations of identity as a continuous process of (re)creation¹⁵ and identity as a fraught and contested concept for queer youth. For queer identified folk our very bodies and what we do with them are the sites of contested debate. This is doubly true for queer youth who are not given bodily agency under the law and are often refused sexual or bodily autonomy by adults. While legitimate concerns about harm and risk exist and protected legal status is warranted, the stigmatization of youth bodies, sexuality, and gender identity is deeply harmful for youth who do not fit within hetero/cisnormative strictures. Having spaces to safely explore identity and have self-identifications affirmed

¹⁵ See Nicholson's notion of self as becoming not being (*Applied* 67) or Ellsworth's concept of the learning-self always in the making (2).

by others are crucial for queer youth. Based on both survey responses and interviews this need is understood by facilitators and a foundational goal driving their work.

The following excerpts from respondents evidence how the goal of identity exploration/affirmation influences QYT practice and bolsters my argument that QYT provides a set of tools and a space in which to explore and proclaim identity. When coded for, survey respondents made clear references to identity exploration/affirmation as a goal. Asked about their goals directly, one respondent hoped participants would, “*Gain a sense of self-awareness, pride, support system amongst the ensemble, and creativity in using art to express their identities.*” Another respondent offered this goal, “*To create a physically and emotionally safe environment for the students (who have very few places where they feel comfortable being open with their identity) to learn, play and express themselves.*” Another directly stated, “*To create original work that gives voice to the aspirations and challenges unique to their [participants’] identity.*” Relevant responses again arose from the question of why use theatre as a medium to achieve these goals? One respondent pointed to arts-based research stating, “*So much research has found [theatre/performance] increases in self-efficacy and self-esteem.*” Another said simply, “*They are able to explore themselves through the art.*”

This final quote neatly summarizes the goal of identity exploration/affirmation and critically connects this goal with an art-based process. I would argue that this goal is derived from facilitators’ recognition of identity as what Helen Nicholson calls “a narrative conception of selfhood” (*Applied* 67). Nicholson proposes that our perceptions

of identity are constantly (re)constructed and (re)formed through contact with others and through shifting cultural contexts. She explains,

Identity is uniquely layered through a historical sedimentation of events and experiences over which, as individuals, we have some degree of choice ... This acknowledges that the aesthetics of self-production is built on the convergence and interplay of different narratives, and that constructing narratives of selfhood is both an ethical and a creative process. (*Applied* 67)

As established in chapter one, Nicholson's conception of identity is linked to Ellsworth's notion of the learning-self—we are always in the process of becoming because we are always (re)learning through encounters and interactions with other individuals, groups, and spaces. These interactions can be random or informed by the intentionality of pedagogy. By using the theories of Nicholson and Ellsworth as a lens to understand the goal of identity exploration and affirmation, I do not imply here that sexuality and gender identity are a choice. Rather, what Nicholson's, and Ellsworth's, notions of *becoming* instead of *being* elucidates is that our personal relationships with, and narratives through which we understand, queerness can and do change. External narratives about queer identity, which promote fear and shame, can be combatted and refused by performance practices that allow narratives of selfhood to shift through explorations that balance hardship with triumphs. QYT creates a space where personal and communally generated, affirming, narratives of self can be rehearsed and performed.

Community Building

Based on my analysis of survey and interview responses, the goal of community building is conceived of and worked towards on two interrelated fronts in QYT; I draw a distinction between them here to aid in reporting and analysis. The first of these fronts is community building with, for, and between queer youth through theatre-making. The importance of fostering community between queer youth is rooted in the often isolating experiences of growing up with, and growing into, awareness of one's own gender and/or sexuality, externally marked as non-normative. This isolation is well documented in the literature on queer youth.¹⁶ That queer communal spaces have traditionally been constructed in adult-only settings, such as bars or nightclubs, further isolates queer youth from broader queer communities (Unks 4). Fostering community with and amongst queer youth is essential to combating the isolation imposed by a hetero/cis/homonormative society. QYT facilitators made clear in their responses that they believe, and I concur, that QYT builds communities among participants through the sharing of personal stories and the work to collectively create performance.

Survey responses most clearly articulated the goal for community building among participants in response to the question: "What are your goals for the participants in your QYT ensemble?" Answers to this questions included direct statements regarding community such as: "*For them [participants] to achieve connectedness and community*

¹⁶ See Miceli 199-202; Owens 15-30; Unks 3-12; Vaccaro, August and Kennedy 17-45. While the 1990s and early 2000s saw several studies of LGB youth published, the exclusion of transgender youth, other gender identities, and other sexual minorities, as well as the rapidly changing landscape of queer politics suggests more contemporary and inclusive studies are long overdue.

with other [ensemble] members and staff.” More common was a reference to ensemble building, “*to create a close knit ensemble that supports each other emotionally and artistically,*” or story sharing, “*to use theater to share their stories.*” While only five out of the nine responses to this question included direct references to community, all thirteen surveys coded for this goal when examining survey responses as a whole. In response to the question, “why do you believe theatre is a useful way to help participants achieve these goals?” one respondent offered, “*because we use personal stories and theatricalize them so that youth are able to create communities through mutual understanding and education.*” More commonly the goal of building community was evidenced in certain answers to questions focused on methods and facilitator positionality. Several methods identified by respondents, such as devised theatre, involve ensemble building and ensemble work, which must then be considered a goal of that facilitator’s process. Additionally, the personal identities claimed by survey takers and how these identities impacted their work often pointed to the importance of building queer communities as a goal for many facilitators. In the words of one, “*It [QYT facilitation] is a chance for me to create, further develop, and direct a program I wish I had when I was in high school. I might've been more comfortable, and been 'out' sooner, if I had a QYT program that made me comfortable enough to be myself.*” Community is not mentioned explicitly in this response, but it resides firmly within this facilitator’s impulse to do the work. The kind of space and “comfort” invoked here is one found in relation to others—it cannot be done alone. In these statements we see facilitators working to open lines of dialogue and support between participants so that commonalities are illuminated and differences

understood between various queer youth experiences. This works to both affirm youth participants' individual identifications but also forge communal bonds, positioning the ensemble to engage in the pursuit of intersectional social justice.

The second front of community building encompassed within this goal involves engaging and dialoguing with broader publics—for example a neighborhood, or a city, or perhaps simply an audience—through acts of performance. My understanding of publics is informed here by queer theorist Michael Warner's postulation that queer existence constitutes a counterpublic to the dominant public of a heteronormative society (56). If performance constitutes the formation of a public then QYT performances create counterpublics due to that performance's inherent opposition to dominant power structures manifested in the identities and stories of the queer youth performers. Warner argues of a counterpublic,

It can work to elaborate new worlds of culture and social relations in which gender and sexuality can be lived, including forms of intimate association, vocabularies of affect, styles of embodiment, erotic practices, and relations of care and pedagogy. It can therefore make possible new forms of gendered or sexual citizenship – meaning active participation in collective *world making* through publics of sex and gender. (57, emphasis mine)

Warner positions counterpublics as having world making potential because they elaborate new and different ways of being in the world. Reading QYT performances as generative of counterpublics allows for a better understanding of the radical nature of placing the voices and experiences of queer youth center stage. Queer youth become the generative

force for the formation of counterpublic communities around their imaginings of new worlds through QYT.

Of course, all theatre is created with the intention of being seen, but I am arguing here that QYT's impulse is to move audiences beyond spectatorship to engage them communally as witnesses to the radical queer futures imagined and enacted by queer youth performers. I am interested in exploring the utopian impulse behind the goal of community building. In their responses, several facilitators pointed to the goal of community building, amongst performers and audience members, as a goal. This was most commonly seen in organization mission statements, such as The Theatre Offensive's mission to "*present the diversity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender lives in art so bold it breaks through personal isolation, challenges the status quo, and builds thriving communities.*" This statement connects performance directly with community building and also gestures toward the utopian. In *Utopia in Performance*, Jill Dolan argues, "Audiences form temporary communities, sites of public discourse that, along with intense experiences of utopian performatives, can model new investments in and interactions with variously constituted public spheres" (*Utopia* 10). Dolan uses theories on the formation of publics and Victor Turner's concept of *communitas*¹⁷, to posit how audiences participate in public discourses through witnessing performance and how this can cause momentary or more prolonged shifts in perception and understanding. Not only does Dolan's argument dialogue with the theories of Muñoz, Nicholson, and

¹⁷ "...the moments in a theater even or a ritual in which audiences or participants feel themselves become part of the whole...and a cohesive if fleeting feeling of belonging to the group bathes the audience" (Dolan *Utopia* 11).

Ellsworth outlined in Chapter One, but when read with Warner offers a powerful theory of the utopian performative's world making potential. Applied to QYT this theory illuminates the goal of building community. I posit that community engagement between QYT performers and audiences has the radical potential to invite queer and non-queer audience members to be transported with and by the youth performers into their imagined queer futures and by so doing challenging and changing perceptions.

Social Justice/Undoing Oppression/Collective Liberation

The goal of social justice voiced by most QYT facilitators is in direct response to the status of queer youth as a doubly minoritized position; sometimes more so when queer youth's intersecting identities such as race, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status are further targeted by oppressive systems. Throughout interviews and survey responses QYT facilitators linked their work to a political undertaking hoping to effect change for and with queer youth. Given applied theatre's concern with "self-development, wellbeing, and social change" it is perhaps unsurprising, yet no less crucial, that social justice would be such a common goal among QYT facilitators (Prentki and Preston 14). Identifying their work with social justice necessitates QYT facilitators seek out methods and adopt aesthetic practices that allow them to work with queer youth as allies. This, in turn, requires facilitators to grapple with the power dynamics of participatory theatre work, asking them to negotiate their own privilege and authority to make room for queer youth voices and experiences.

Ten out of the eleven surveys mention social justice, if not in name then in practice. In some responses it came directly out of the organization's mission statement. For example Out & Allied Youth Theatre's mission statement reads: "Out & Allied Youth Theatre is a troupe of artists who use theater to share their stories, build community, and address issues of social justice." Other reported mission statements demonstrate a commitment to social justice, even though the exact phrase may not have appeared in the organization's language. This is clearly seen in The Theatre Offensive's mission to "make art so bold it...challenges the status quo," demonstrating a commitment to working toward social justice without invoking the phrase. Another respondent indicated that their organization has no formal mission statement but instead has "core values" including "undoing oppression."

Other survey respondents brought up social justice in relation to their own positionality as a facilitator. One offered, "*as a gay man, I am passionate about this work. It is the reason I started this work. I know first hand some of the struggles the queer youth face and I am dedicated to make the schools and our community a safer space for queer youth.*"¹⁸ Eight out of the eleven survey respondents identified as a member of the LGBTQIAP+ community and all eight of these connected their queer identity to the work that they do in some form. One respondent said, "*I feel a call to this work because I too was a queer youth interested in theatre and had no idea the two could work together. I believe in activism: using art as a tool for activism, and I believe*

¹⁸ Throughout this thesis the words of survey respondents and interviewees will be italicized so as to distinguish their voices from mine.

engaging in dialogue around queer topics and translating that to the stage is an undeniable force in today's world." This powerful statement charts how QYT facilitation is deeply entwined with the personal identifications and political values of the individuals practicing it. Additionally, multiple coding themes arising from this statement; not only does the respondent call for activism, but does so through arts-based practices, clearly touching on arts education and exposure, as well as identity exploration and affirmation. This evidences the interconnectedness of the goals outlined in this section. Furthermore, the respondents invoking of "artivism" highlights that QYT's social and political impulse to challenge and undo oppressive systems of power are inseparable and fundamental to its aesthetic form.

Foregrounding concerns of facilitator power and privilege, one respondent referenced her positionality in relation to her participants: *"My queer/lesbian identity informs my understanding of solidarity. I do not share many identities with our ensemble members but I come from a belief that queer liberation means centering the stories and experiences of the most marginalized folks in our community. When young trans women of color are free we will all be free!"* Later in the survey this respondent identified herself as a *"college educated, upper middle class white woman,"* acknowledging her position of privilege in relation to many of her youth participants. This facilitator's goal of queer liberation is bound up in her understanding of liberation as an intersectional struggle concerning multiple identities. She borrows from the Combahee River Collective's Statement, which reads: "if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the

systems of oppression” (278). Refiguring this vital statement to include trans women of color is linked to the many forms of oppression this population faces, including disproportionately high rates of sexual and physical violence. Non-queer identifying survey respondents also expressed awareness of being in a position of privilege and power as a facilitator working with queer youth. Thus facilitators’ own identities, and the acknowledgement of their identities as being in relation to their participants’ identities, inform facilitators’ conceptions of the goal of social justice.

Collectively, the statements made by facilitators above, and throughout the survey and interview responses, strongly identify social justice as a goal for their artistic practice with queer youth. Furthermore, these statements, and the other goals outlined in this section, point to a nuanced understanding of social justice that encompasses both individual empowerment and collective liberation. Elaborating on how the relationship between art and social change is theorized, Helen Nicholson explicates the tensions between individualized idealist liberal notions of social intervention through art and more Marx-based materialists views of artistic collectives working for systemic change. Nicholson observes that rarely do ADT practices fall solely into one of these two camps and argues “it is important, especially for those practitioners whose intention is social change, to consider the relationship between idealism and materialism in relation to creative practice, as each defines different objectives for the work and asserts a different social vision” (*Applied* 119). Her framing of these two value systems in relation to ADT is crucial when considering how QYT facilitators’ conceive of and work towards social justice in their practice. When Nicholson’s frame is placed around QYT facilitators’

goals of identity affirmation and community building it becomes clear how these goals work in relation allowing QYT to hold both idealist and materialist leanings. This duality is vital for a queer intersectional understanding and pursuit of social justice because it makes room for a myriad of individual identifications and expressions while simultaneously encouraging the formation of community through performance making.

Arts Education and Exposure

Survey and interview respondents articulated arts education and exposure as a frame through which hardships and triumphs of queer life might be rehearsed. They describe performance as a means of moving negative experiences into a meaning-making process that fuels activism. In other words, facilitators expressed the belief that exposure to, and training in, theatre-making provides queer youth with life-long tools to process their experiences. In my interview with Adam, he illustrated this point as we discussed his goals for his youth participants sharing with me,

I feel like I'm more invested in young people realizing or wanting to be talking about hard shit through art than what the hard shit is. I think it is the art to me where I'm like ok we can talk about identity, we can talk about loss, we can talk about grief, we can talk about love—through art. And I want you [participants] to feel that anyone can do that. Anyone, regardless of your identity or situation or experience around the arts, that if the space is created the right way it should be something that can engage anybody.

Engaging in art-making, for Adam, becomes a tool of survival and a tool that, given exposure and access, anyone can use. Adam argues for art-making as a life skill, a skill that can allow us, as minoritarian subject-citizens, to deal with “hard shit,” or, put another way, to seize control of one’s own narrative. Arts education as a goal of QYT is about far more than making a piece of theatre with queer youth, it is about teaching the tool of performance that can be employed again and again, not just in QYT programs but throughout the lives of youth participants.

A Hopeful Foundation for QYT

To guard against overdetermining the goals outlined in this section I have considered each goal individually. Despite this separation, I hope that the discussion above has already begun to demonstrate how intricately linked *identity exploration/affirmation, community building, social justice, and arts education/exposure* are in facilitators’ conceptions of QYT practice. I am interested in how, when read together, the goals presented above could serve as a model for stages of civic engagement. The political begins with the personal, so too in QYT as each individual participant’s identifications and existence are affirmed through the sharing and exploration of personal narratives. The individual sharing of experiences within the group leads to a recognitions of both commonalities and differences allowing intersectional communities to be fostered. These communities work towards collective liberation as an intersectional struggle by producing performances for wider publics that allow the performers to control and imagine new narratives for their lives. In this light QYT is seen

as a rehearsal for and public demonstration of new modes of citizenship, modes dreamed up and enacted by queer youth.

This is without doubt a hopeful, perhaps even idealistic, interpretation of these four goals and their potential. It is important to remember Nicholson's caution that "performance is not in itself politically radical, relationships between participants and practitioners [or fellow participants] are not automatically trusting, and theatre is not necessarily an instrument for social change" (*Applied* 29). This is a salient warning as the model offered above assumes affirmation, and community, and change are all possible through performance and achievable in QYT. While Nicholson is right that we must not assume any applied theatre practice, or general theatre performance, will innately have these properties, we must also remember that a goal is inherently hopeful. It is a wished for outcome, not a given one, and so I read these goals in a hopeful light. "Hope," Muñoz suggests, "is the emotional modality that permits us to access futurity, par excellence" (*Cruising* 98). Muñoz describes the importance of hope for minoritarian citizen subjects as a mean of accessing the future through knowing that the present is insufficient. When we consider the four goals suggested here through this lens then the goals facilitators' carry for their work are bound up in imminent futures both deeply hoped for and keenly felt.

Two moments of my conversations with facilitators depict how these four goals function together to infuse QYT with a utopian impulse. The first is from my interview with Magenta Davenport. When asked about her goals she replied:

I don't know if anyone's every asked me that question. To have a deeper belief in themselves and the ability for their voice to mean something. To deepen their analysis and understanding of how their struggles intertwine with other people's struggles. I mean really my ultimate goal is to create lots of tiny revolutionaries. That art is important. That like, just because they're queer doesn't mean that they don't deserve—that they're worthy right?

Each of the four goals in consideration can be found within this statement and hope infuses the sentiment. Relayed in near list form, Magenta's goals could almost be read as a recipe, suggesting that one goal springs from the next and informs the others. The rest of my discussion with Magenta reinforces this connection. She repeatedly references intersectionality, community, identity, art in relation to the others as inseparable within her practice. The interconnectedness of these goals becomes apparent when coding for them.

In my conversation with Diana there were several instances of identifying via coding two, three, or all four goals in a single sentence or idea. She expressed her goals as such:

My number one thing I want them to come out with is that everywhere you go you can find a coterie, you can find individuals, you can find people that together you can create a community. That you can create that space for yourself and you can create that space for other people. My larger goal, that's my very basic goal is that they find each other and they know that they have a place where they can be themselves. My larger goal is I want—I really hope that at least some of them see

the power of theatre and the power of art and that they will continue to use this power that they're given and this talent that they're given to create further change in their communities, whatever community happens to be after they become adults and leave their parents house that they're going to continue to pass this on somehow.

Here Diana connects the making of art to community building through imparting the tool of art and hoping that tool is used and taught to others. Diana also links this sharing and teaching, directly to the pursuit of social justice. Both Magenta's and Diana's statements connect the goals facilitators' express for their practice with changes they wish to see in the world. In this sense QYT facilitator's goals are hopes held for their youth participants, and perhaps for themselves as well. These hopes lay the foundation for the collective imagining of queer utopian futures that I argue are at the heart of QYT.

METHODS: QYT'S INFLUENTIAL FAMILY TREE

Having discerned and delineated the four goals above from my interlocutors' responses to survey and interview questions, I now turn to a consideration of the various methods of performance practices and participatory engagement strategies facilitators reported drawing upon in their QYT work. By aligning the goals and methods of QYT in this fashion, I ask how form follows and reflects function? In other words, how are the methods facilitators' employ in QYT indicative of, and even models for, the goals outlined and argued for above? I define my use of *method* here as specific, established groups of arts-based and/or pedagogic practices, named and codified over time, that share similar ideologies and motivations. For QYT then, methods are inspirational frameworks,

influences, and/or ways of working, which facilitators feel are useful when engaging queer youth in performance making. In addition to considering the questions above, this section discusses the individual methods identified by facilitators as being used in their work, the reasons facilitators' offered for why these methods are influential, and what these methods may indicate about the practice of QYT.

Five methods—*applied theatre*, *Boal Techniques*, *creative drama*, *youth theatre*, and *devised theatre*—were identified from the survey responses as being most widely used by facilitators in QYT. By claiming these particular methods as relevant to, and aligned with, their work, facilitators chart a lineage for QYT, situating their practice amidst a long tradition and continuing network of interrelated participatory and pedagogic performance methods. While the histories of theatre education, drama created with and for youth, and devised performance making are well documented,¹⁹ the particular legacy and narrative invoked by naming these five methodologies historicizes QYT and is worth briefly tracing here.

Creative drama, or creative dramatics as Winifred Ward named it, is chronologically the earliest of the five terms listed above. Largely founded by Ward, creative drama “was a movement that aimed to encourage children’s playfulness and imaginative development through improvised drama” (Nicholson *Theatre* 53). In tracing the development of her own work and of theatre for children in the US, Ward points to the importance of the social house movement in creating spaces where youth could

¹⁹ See Deirdre Heddon’s and Jane Milling’s *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, Manon van de Water’s *Theatre, Youth, and Culture: A Critical and Historical Exploration*, and Helen Nicholson’s excellent *Theatre, Education and Performance*.

engage in theatre, citing Chicago's Hull House as an example (Ward 44-45). Ward's connection to Hull House, was not only geographic (she was based in Evanston, IL) but ideological, serving to root creative drama in the progressive education theories of the late 19th and early 20th century.²⁰

Hull House also gave rise to the improvisational theatre work of Viola Spolin, one of the several methods facilitators could select on the survey. Spolin's teacher Neva Boyd was a key figure in Hull House and, and a colleague of Ward at Northwestern University (Spolin xlvii). In 1963 Spolin published *Improvisation for the Theater*, which "became one of the most-influential post war actor-training texts" (Heddon and Milling 34). The games and improv activities Spolin outlined were embraced not only for actor-training but as a means to generate performance material as well. In many ways this work was foundational for radical theatre practices of the 1960s and 70s, which sought means to *devise theatre* collectively. The work of Brazilian theatre maker and theorist *Augusto Boal* also grows out of leftist politics of the 60s and 70s. Based on the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, Boal advocates for a theatre that divests power from theatre artists to audiences, empowering them to be agents in the performance. By connecting the threads of progressive education and the work of Boal through the methods selected on the survey, QYT facilitators have rooted their work to what Helen Nicholson describes as the two major strands of pedagogy that inform *applied theatre* (*Applied* 11). The only method identified by facilitators that is absent from this narrative is *youth theatre*. Like

²⁰ For more on progressive education and its connection to creative drama see Nicholson *Education* 41-56 or Water 10-15.

applied theatre, youth theatre is an umbrella term “used to describe a wide variety of organizations that engage young people in theatre related activities” (Huges and Wilson 58). While a more recent term, youth theatre certainly fits within the brief history offered here as a more contemporary extension of earlier efforts to engage young people through performance.

I have tried to briefly demonstrate through this historical narrative that, intentional or not, in selecting their methodological affiliations and inspirations, facilitators have positioned QYT within a lineage that traces certain origins of applied theatre practice. It is important to acknowledge that the history I have sketched here is woefully incomplete. While this narrative critically aligns QYT with the two major pedagogic influences on ADT, it leaves out the influences of queer performance on QYT aesthetics and politics, as well as other methods of making theatre (some pointed to, some not, by facilitators) that impact QYT practice. What this overview has achieved is to indicate the further historical inquiry QYT warrants to trace its roots through both queer and applied performance. It is also worth noting that Helen Nicholson’s excellent historicizing of theatre education, in *Theatre, Education and Performance*, points to the utopian impulse within progressive education. Nicholson recounts teacher Harriet Finlay-Johnson’s phrase of the “Utopian child” (*Theatre* 44). It would perhaps be a stretch to map a queer utopian performative reading onto progressive education, however, it is noteworthy that the methodological roots of QYT demonstrate pedagogies and practices which had eyes trained on a utopian horizon.

With this history and the utopian impulse it implies established, the remainder of this section works to further explicate the methods identified by QYT facilitators as salient to their work. In my survey, facilitators were presented the table shown below and asked to mark and method they used in their QYT work.²¹

Methods	X
Applied Theatre	8
Boal Techniques	7
Creative Drama	6
Digital Storytelling	4
Drama Based Pedagogy	3
Sociodrama	3
Spolin based Improvisation	4
Theatre for Dialogue	3
Theatre in Education	4
Youth Theatre	7
Other	

Table 1

In this table I have also included the number of times each method was selected. If other was selected, facilitators were then given a blank space and asked to name additional methods employed. This was then followed by the questions: “Why do you find these particular methods helpful to frame and/or use in your work in QYT?” and “What specific activities do you draw from these methods and how do you use them in with your QYT ensemble?” As suggested by the historical narrative earlier, each method listed in the table above falls under the umbrella of applied theatre even though most predate the term. These methods are by no means an exhaustive list; they were selected for their

²¹When built in Qualtrics, the presentation of the list of options looked different than this. This table represents a close approximation and preserves the alphabetical order choices were presented in.

range of specificity and breadth in the hopes that the list might prompt QYT facilitators to create their own list after selecting “other” on the form. In other words, the intent of the list was to prompt a generative reflection whereby facilitators identify methods routinely drawn upon in their work.

Applied Theatre

Applied theatre is not strictly a method as I have defined the term. As described in chapter one, ADT does not offer a single set of concrete forms that can be pointed to and identified as applied theatre. Rather, I adopt Helen Nicholson’s stance that ADT is more helpfully thought of as a constantly negotiated set of intensions for performance and a call to reflexive practice that considers the ethics of engaging in participatory performance with others (*Applied* 164-165). She explains further, “rather than seeking a single canonical reference point or a single set of dramatic practices, it [ADT] is an approach to theatre-making which embraces diverse forms of cultural learning and many different theatre forms” (*Applied* 165). Given this, ADT’s inclusion on the survey with other methods was to provide facilitators with a choice to identify, or not, with a label that has been applied to their work. The results were that nine out of the eleven facilitators who responded to this question selected applied theatre. This signals facilitators’ strong affiliation with ADT. This aligns QYT with “an opportunity for an ethical praxis which disrupts horizons, in which new insights are generated and where the familiar might be seen, embodied and represented from alternative perspectives and different points of view” (Nicholson *Applied* 174).

Boal Techniques

Boal techniques is used to encompass any and all theatrical practices developed and promoted by theatre artist, educator, and theorist, Augusto Boal. Boal's methods focus heavily on engaging the audience, specifically in the work of rehearsing interventions in unequal power structures. Drawing inspiration from the critical pedagogies of Paulo Freire, Boal's methods are often collected together under the mantle of *Theatre of the Oppressed* (TO), the title of his first book, which outlines his ideas on how theatre can rehearse for revolution by making theatre's audience active interveners and participants in the drama, instead of passive observers (*Theatre* 122). Affiliating QYT with Boal's methods points to my suggestion earlier that QYT can serve as a model for alternative forms of civic/social engagement. By using the term Boal techniques instead of TO as a category I hoped to make room for other exercises and theories, promoted by Boal in later works such as *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* and *The Rainbow of Desire*, that take TO as their foundation but expand upon it in meaningful ways.

Boal techniques was selected in seven of the eleven responses to this question. This strong affiliation with Boal techniques may represent facilitators' understanding of a historical lineage as Boal's theories and practices are foundational to many forms of ADT. Because this survey question was asking respondents to identify specific methodologies employed in their practice, Boal techniques clearly remain an integral method employed by many QYT facilitators. Given both Freire's and Boal's concerns about power dynamics between teacher/student and artist/audience, this use of Boal may

indicate an attempt by facilitators to mitigate their power and privilege within their QYT ensemble. Another reason for the use of Boal may rest in range of performance experience and skill found within QYT ensembles. Three of four interviewees mentioned in some way the mix within their ensembles of novice and more experienced youth performers. Central to much, if not all, of Boal's work is the desire to empower theatre audiences, shifting them from passive spectators of the drama to agents acting within it (*Theatre* 122, 155). Thus, necessarily, many of the exercises and forms Boal creates revolve around the question of how to make untrained audiences comfortable and willing to jump into the theatrical action and improvise. With the range of theatrical experience found within QYT ensembles, facilitators' may be finding Boal techniques useful in leveling the experience playing field, allowing all ensemble members to feel comfortable participating.

Two respondents named specific elements adopted and adapted from Boal for their QYT work—Forum Theatre and Newspaper theatre. Forum Theatre is a key element of Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal summarizes Forum Theatre as consisting “of proposing to a group of spectators, after a first improvisation of a scene, that they replace the protagonist and try to improvise variations on his actions” (*Rainbow* 184). This process allows the audience, or spect-actors, to propose alternative actions or solutions to the issue being explored in the scene. For example, if, during rehearsal, a QYT ensemble was improvising a scene about bullying this method would allow various participants to contribute their ideas about how to handle the situation. A scene could then be scripted from these improvisations. Alternatively, this method can be used in performance,

allowing queer youth participants to dialogue with their audiences about strategies of allyship and bystander intervention.

A respondent also identified Newspaper Theater as a method drawn from Boal Techniques stating that it “*fit well with the type of devising we do.*” In *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Newspaper Theatre is defined as “consist[ing] of several simple techniques for transforming daily news items, or any other non-dramatic material, into theatrical performances” (Boal *Theatre* 143). Notably, this facilitator links their use of Newspaper Theatre with devised theatre, showing how different methods are combined in the practice of QYT. This method is significant due to queer youth’s portrayal within the news and broader mass media. Jama Shelton reminds us that the “experiences and desires [of queer youth]...are rarely included in mass media representations or within dominant cultural theory and practice” (69). Shelton describes how queer youth claim ownership of their own stories and lives through, what Shelton terms, “self-representational performance” (69). I will return to this concept in chapter three, but it is important to mark it here because most often when youth marked as queer appear in the news it is due to suicide. While suicide rates are distressingly high for queer, especially transgender, youth the mass media sensationalism of queer youth suicide means these stories have come to dominate popular narratives regarding the lives of queer youth.²² Newspaper Theatre provides one means through which queer youth may reclaim ownership over the narratives of their lives and pushback upon externally imposed narratives that seek to govern queer youth experiences.

²² For statistics on queer youth suicide see The Trevor Project’s website under “Facts About Suicide.”

Youth Theatre

Like applied theatre, youth theatre cannot really be said to be one method of theatre, rather it is a collection of methods and practices that have youth participation and performance at their heart. Youth theatre tied Boal techniques for the second most selected methodology after applied theatre. In their extensive study on youth theatre in the United Kingdom, Jenny Hughes and Karen Wilson identify four different models of youth theatre based on various organizations' objectives (62). Based on their research, Hughes and Wilson also offer "a theory for youth theatre" arguing,

The whole activity of youth theatre is focussed on providing young people with the skills and resources to develop their initiative, confidence, ability to express themselves and take risks...[Youth theatre] involves opportunities to invest the self in a creative process of discovery but also provide a structure and set of conventions for self-expression and exploration of identity. (67-68)

Hughes and Wilson note how this is an especially important resource for youth who experience various forms of marginalization and link their overall theory of youth theatre to "psychological theories such as role theory" as well as "Victor Turner's concept of *liminal*" space (68-69 emphasis theirs). Hughes and Wilson go on to suggest, "Liminal space or liminoid activities provide a place/time outside of normal routines where people (temporarily) shed their ascribed roles and identities and experiment with a new range of expression in a different social reality" (69). This space of exploration enables youth to try on different ideas and ways of being in the world. Based on Hughes and Wilson's

figuring of youth theatre, it could be argued that youth theatre's and queer youth theatre's raisons d'être are closely aligned if not identical.

Since youth theatre comprises numerous methods and practices, the high number of responses affirming it as resource for QYT facilitators may correspond more to a feeling of methodological kinship between QYT and youth theatre than a specific set of practices from which QYT facilitators borrow. This suggests an understandable mentality: if we, facilitators, are doing queer youth theatre, surely then we are doing youth theatre. In this formulation QYT becomes a subcategory of youth theatre. This implies an easy hierarchy of terms and forms that I wish to resist and briefly problematize. Youth theatre has noble intentions as illustrated by Hughes and Wilson, but I am troubled by their studies failure to acknowledge the contextual specificity of youth experience. In discussions of how youth theatre encourages identity exploration, Hughes and Wilson seem to envisage youth identity as a tabula rasa to be filled in on the journey to adulthood. This ignores the myriad of narratives externally loaded onto youth identities based on specificities of culture, time, and the intersecting identities any individual youth may hold. In *Digital Storytelling, Applied Theater, & Youth*, Megan Alrutz observes of youth theatre she has experienced:

Much of the performance work created with and for youth does not address identity politics or identity-based differences in a direct or significant way. Reoccurring and often hidden and systemic efforts to depoliticize our engagements with youth means that many young people, as well as adults, lack models for attending to power, identity, and difference. (112)

The excising of politics from performance that Alrutz describes jars dramatically with the goals that the interlocutors of this study identified for their practice. Perhaps then, QYT attempts to address a perceived deficit in youth theatre practices. When at its best, QYT practices explore questions regarding the intersectionality of identities, and the social and political ramifications of differing identities making art together. Clearly the story that opened this chapter demonstrates that the real does not always mirror the ideal, however, the facilitators participating in this study have overall been keenly aware of their need to address their own power and privilege, and to continue to challenge their own assumptions and beliefs in their practice. If a principle goal of QYT is diving into political questions of power, identity, difference, and social justice then, perhaps, instead of viewing queer youth theatre as a subset of youth theatre, we should consider QYT a queering of youth theatre.

Creative Drama

Six out of the eleven responses to this survey question selected creative drama as a methodological source. In *Theatre, Education and Performance*, Helen Nicholson traces the interconnected history of creative drama in both the US and the UK. She notes that it “was a movement that aimed to encourage children’s playfulness and imaginative development through improvised drama” (53). Nellie McCaslin, a leader in the field of creative drama, expands on Nicholson:

Creative drama in essence is improvisation and all theatre begins with spontaneous expression, improvisation, and the unscripted play. It is the process, not the product that comes first. This process is unformed, unfinished, crude and free of the need of approval. Creative drama is an art form that exists for its own sake serving the player as an enjoyable and significant life experience.

(McCaslin)

Play and improvisation are important generative forms in creative drama, borrowed in QYT work. As one survey respondent noted “*Creative drama is the foundation of all of our work here.*”

I would also suggest that McCaslin’s emphasis on process must not be overlooked. While components of the four goals outlined in the above section are achieved through public performance, much of the work done in service of these goals happens through experiences encountered in rehearsals or sessions. In other words, an audience is not required, or perhaps even desired, for much of the work of QYT. Instead, as McCaslin suggests of creative drama, much of QYT’s form “exists for its own sake,” hopefully allowing for meaningful, generative, and affirmative experiences through affective performances. This is an idea I will explore further in chapter three.

Devised Theatre

Devised theatre is a method of theatre making that tries to create performance communally, working to move away from the sometimes rigid power hierarchies found within the theatre. While goals and strategies of devised theatre vary widely, my

experience is that, at its heart, devised theatre attempts to democratize the theatre making process, allowing a plurality of voices, with a range of artistic skill level and familiarity, to participate in the creation and execution of performance. Devised theatre, also sometimes called collaborative creation, arose as a method of generating performance in the 1960s and 70s as various theatre companies and ensembles drew inspiration from radical political movements seeking to create a just government and equitable society (Heddon and Milling 12). Notably in *Devising Performance*, Deidre Heddon and Jane Milling connect the impulse to collaboratively devise to Second Wave Feminism and Gay Liberation. In the face of deeply sexist and homophobic onstage stereotypes, collaborative devising offered a “means of wresting the mode of production from the grip of dominating institutions and dominant ideologies” (17). By employing devised theatre as a method QYT facilitators tap into an aesthetic means of making that has traditionally been concerned with undoing unjust systemic power structures.

While typically focused on developing new material, devised theatre can come in many forms. I have worked in various devised theatre ensembles with goals as wide ranging as generating a completely new play, to adapting a literary or autobiographical work for the stage, to mounting a production of Shakespeare. Devised theatre, or collaboration, was the method identified most often by respondents who selected “other” on the list of methodologies. When asked to expound on their methods, devised theatre was often seen as a process of work in the service of which other methods were used. Responses that illustrate this include, “*We use them [other methods] to devise the script we are writing,*” and, “*Spolin- to teach improv basics and devising.*” Here the games and

improve techniques developed by Viola Spolin are directly linked to one facilitator's devised theatre method. Four survey respondents identified Spolin based improvisation as a method used within their work. The linking of Spolin based methods, as well as the Boal techniques discussed above, to devised theatre paints a picture of the kind of methodological discourse and exchange at work in QYT facilitation. Speaking eloquently of devising as a method, one survey taker wrote, "*We encourage the writing and telling of our unique life experiences and then translating those stories into work on stage. We start from a place within ourselves and transform it externally.*" Here the method of devising allows facilitators to privilege individual experiences and identities and then to communally shape these stories of self into performance. Devised theatre serves as a way to create performance out of queer youth's narratives. This quote speaks to the importance of devised theatre as a method for trying to meet the goals facilitators have for QYT.

Devised Theatre was also mentioned as a key method used in the work of all four interviewees. As above, devising was typically discussed as a broader method of work in which other specific methods were employed. Magenta Davenport described her methods: "*We do a lot of Viewpoints. We use Junebug's story circle methodology. We do some TO stuff. And we make up shit. You know its kind of a hodgepodge. My training has primarily been with Junebug and Artspot. I don't even know what they would call their devising methods. So we do a lot of stuff.*" Here, Davenport describes multiple methods she employs in her QYT work, including the Viewpoints system made popular by Ann Bogart and the story circle methodology developed by the Free Southern Theater and

continued by its successor Junebug Productions (“Junebug”). Importantly, she frames all of these methods as part of her devising process with her QYT ensemble. Similarly, Adam names numerous methods, artists, and theatre ensembles he draws from in his QYT work describing how these come together stating, “*My colleagues and I have kinda found our own collaborative language, which is totally steeped in a little bit of Viewpoints a little bit of Michael Rohd a little bit of Boal.*” QYT facilitators, like Magenta and Adam, are clearly developing their own devising processes with their ensembles and co-facilitators by drawing from multiple methodologies, which allow them to effectively collaborate and generate performance with queer youth.

Recognizing devised theatre as a methodological glue that unites multiple methods within facilitators’ practices points to how QYT facilitators navigate the ethical questions surrounding what Tim Prentki describes as the poetics of applied theatre (Prentki 20). These questions include, what are the forms of art and art-making we use in our work? And, how are those forms responsive and to the various cultures in which we practice our applied theatre? The collaborative-based approach of devised theatre allows facilitators to both privilege the ideas, interests, and experiences of a diverse group of queer youth, and to offer various dramatic tools as aides, various skirts, if you will, for youth to try on as they explore ways to make their art, affirm their identity, build a community, and imagine and enact social justice.

The methods outlined above and their deployment in facilitators’ practice elaborates, not only a lineage of theatre making traditions influential on QYT, but how

facilitators borrow selectively from that lineage, taking from each method the tools that further the goals of their practice. Whether using imaginative play from creative drama, the liminal permissive space of youth theatre, the mitigation of power and privilege from Boal, the ethical imperatives of ADT, or the collaboration of devised theatre, the use of these methods in QYT places queer youth theatre both in relation to and in conversation with these other forms. Both survey respondents and interviewees invoked numerous methods as influences on their QYT facilitation. Methods as diverse as dance-theatre, theatre-in-education, sociodrama, and digital storytelling were identified by facilitators as part of their work. Focusing specifically on the methods selected by a majority of survey respondents and interviewees has allowed for a focused analysis of how these methods are used within QYT practice, how they influence the form of QYT, and how they serve to advance the goals facilitators' hold for their QYT ensembles.

A CONSTELLATION OF PRACTICE

Taken together, the goals and methods proposed and outlined in this chapter begin to chart a constellation of QYT practice. The metaphor of a constellation is fitting for QYT. Constellations have no defined boundary; they are a series of stars, of coordinates onto which we read an image. Constellations also move over time, they shift position, and they change as stars get dimmer, brighter, flare into existence, and wink out. The goals and methods identified through my survey and interviews are stars in the constellation QYT. I have, in this chapter, offered my interpretation of the image those stars create. A suggestion of what QYT consists of and what it is for, what it is meant to achieve. I have outlined the goals and methods that shone brightest in this study, whose

gravity seemed to influence the others. Like the tracing of any constellation this picture is only partial; depending on the viewers vantage point and the lens of their telescope this picture might change. The power of a constellation is that it can be what the viewer needs it to be, and I would argue the great strength of the goals and methods discussed above is that they allow QYT to serve queer youth. Rather than impose its form upon them, the goals and methods of QYT enable it to react, to change its form to fit queer youth's needs, their desires, their imaginings. Queer youth are dreaming up futures for themselves with or without QYT, believe me, I did; what QYT provides is a forum, a testing ground for those futures, a space to enact them, to try them on and see what fits. QYT is a vehicle to transport us—queer youth, facilitators, and audience—to that imagined queer future so that we may know it for a moment in the present, feel its imminence, and start building. This result, of course, is not a given. It takes work, hard work, and on the part of QYT facilitators it means developing a reflexive praxis which serves to challenge our own assumptions and check and correct our biases; it requires a willingness to laugh at our own rigidity when, inevitably, the constellation shifts.

Chapter 3: Interior Decorating or Practicing QYT

We need to learn how to practice justice, for it is through practice that we come to envision new modes of living and new modes of being that support these visions. Where do our visions of justice originate? How do we inhabit them? Clearly our task is to reexamine and transform inherited practices that stand in the way of justice.

–M. Jacqui Alexander

*All I want is to be wanted
all I want is to feel safe
I never felt the warmth of support
never was in a place that wasn't forced*

*don't you think it'd be nice
to escape this life
and go outside of these
boundaries - boundaries
when I'm not home
it's when I feel home
looking at the moon in your arms*

– Red Goblet and TheatriQ Youth

WEBS

Roughly one dozen youth performers walk onto the stage each holding a tablet computer about chest high which they study intently as a digital voice welcomes the audience to Dreams of Hope's production of *Webs*. As the stage lights dim the actors raise the tablets to their faces, screens out to the audience, revealing twelve blank white screens which is soon all that can be seen in the dark of the theatre. Simultaneously, the digital voice begins to break down, repeating and stuttering, *webs, webssss, webbbzzzzz*, while ringtones, pings, and other alerts and noises commonly found on smart phones and tablets interrupt and interweave forming a cacophony of digital sounds. Images of

frequently used symbols in social media begin to appear on the tablets resulting in a dozen # faces, then a dozen :) faces, then a dozen :/ faces gazing at the audience. The images change in rapid succession and become more complex, become something a keyboard cannot produce until finally the screens display two beautifully drawn fish and then a drawing of a spider hanging down from its web. After this last image disappears, the screens turn red, illuminating a series of tableaux, the last centering on three actors who unfreeze and, as blue light slowly spills onto the stage, unfreeze the other actors with a touch. These same three, costumed in white with red images associated with sewing printed on their clothes, take a position upstage and begin to recount the Greek myth of Arachne, each taking turns in the telling like old friends trying to collectively recount a story.

As they begin their tale a screen next to these three narrators (or fates as the costuming suggests)²³ is illuminated from behind and stunningly crafted shadow puppets enact the myth as Arachne's story is told. Downstage and to either side of this centrally placed screen are two actors each reading a mythology book. At one point the ring of a phone is heard. As each reader answers their phone the lights change, becoming harsher, more saturated, and the myth narration pauses while the readers explain to the caller that they are doing homework. When the call ends and the readers resume their work the narration continues. The scene concludes with Athena's transformation of Arachne into a spider, at which point the Arachne shadow puppet—whose image consists only of her

²³ The three Greek fates were depicting as constantly sewing individual threads into and out of the tapestry of life.

two spinning hands and arms, and a dress—sprouts six additional limbs as her dress curves upwards to form her newly acquired abdomen.

I open with this description of the first scene of Dreams of Hope's TheatriQ Youth Ensemble production of their original play *Webs*²⁴ because the production illustrates numerous and nuanced ways in which queer youth and the facilitators who work with them in QYT ensembles are deploying theatre to make-meaning, explore and affirm identity, forge community and work towards social justice. *Webs* weaves together complex intersecting elements of queer youth experiences and culture into a narrative rooted in the past and oriented towards the future. Using the frame of mythology, specifically the myths of Pisces and Arachne, the TheatriQ Youth ensemble imagine what a queer mythology might be, offering to their audience models of queer myth building and positive adult-youth allyship while endeavoring to center the experiences of trans, black, and homeless queer youth.

In this final chapter I use *Webs* as a frame through which I explore QYT facilitator and participant practices. *Webs* provides a referent for several common elements of QYT practice, as well as certain tensions between practices, that the following sections aim to name, theorize, and explore in relation to the goals and methods discussed in chapter two. Finally, I conclude with the lingering questions that remain for me after writing this thesis, expounding on where I believe further scholarship of QYT is

²⁴ All descriptions of *Webs* are based upon filmed performance footage, which was generously provided to me by Dreams of Hope.

needed, and imagining the directions QYT practices, including my own, may take in the future.

YOUTH-DRIVEN

Hello I'm TJ. I'm the assistant director for this play Webs. This is an original production done almost entirely by the youth; that means it was written, it was partially directed by, it was costumed, and the set designs are all by the youth. This is a play that is very important to us. It deals with many topics that include microaggressions, trans housing issues, and gender identity. So we hope that you not only enjoy it, but you also learn from it. Thank you.

This statement is the preface to *Webs*, delivered by TJ the play's assistant director with the ensemble standing behind them²⁵, just before the lights go down. The statement is an invitation, but also a reminder. TJ informs the audience that this production has been created *by* youth and in so doing reminds us of our assumptions about youth capacity and agency. The TheatriQ Youth Ensemble's important assertion of creative ownership reminded me of my own youth theatre experiences (which were not overtly queer) in which adults did much if not all of the labor, except the acting. Scripts were chosen; directions given; costumes, props, and sets made *for* youth without any input from us, the youth. The youth theatre I participated in reflected, in many ways, the workings of many professional theatre companies where everyone has their assigned task or function within the production. As I have asserted throughout this thesis, and as is made evident by TJ's

²⁵ I use them here as a singular gender-neutral pronoun, which I will do for several individuals and characters throughout this chapter.

introductory speech to *Webs*, QYT departs from traditional modes of theatre-making with youth.

TJ's speech at the beginning of *Webs* describes a *youth-driven* process. I borrow the term youth-driven from The Neutral Zone, a teen center of Ann Arbor, Michigan, which runs its own QYT ensemble, Gayrilla Theatre Project. The first session I attended at the Pride Youth Theatre Alliance Conference 2015 was a presentation and discussion titled "Youth Driven Space: Where Young People's Ideas and Voices are Central," presented by two Neutral Zone youth and an adult partner. This talk identified three tenets of youth-driven space: 1) that it tap into teens' intrinsic motivation, 2) that it support teens' developmental needs, 3) that it foster youth-adult partnerships (routenberg, Sheng and Spranger). This was expertly modeled during the presentation as the youth presenters took the lead with the adult partner providing support. It became clear during the discussion portion of this presentation that a variety of language is emerging for youth-driven spaces and youth-driven processes and that QYT facilitators know and understand similar or identical concepts to youth-driven space by several different terms.

Rather than parse terminology, I am interested in discussing here what youth-driven space and similar practices mean for QYT, especially how they impact the role of facilitators within QYT. A queer youth-driven space and/or process means not only centering the stories and experiences of queer youth but also giving queer youth agency within the production process, the QYT ensemble, and possibly even the broader organization housing the QYT program. To work as a QYT facilitator in a queer youth-driven space/process means taking queer youth voices seriously by treating them as

partners in a collaborative process of theatre-making and by giving them a say in artistic and even monetary decision making. This is akin to what Megan Alrutz describes as being a youth-allied adult. Speaking of her own applied theatre practice, she explains:

Rather than aiming to be in charge of the youths with whom I collaborate, I strive to both acknowledge my identity-based privilege and power...and disrupt traditionally top-down power dynamics between young people and adult program facilitators. I also participate in and facilitate creative practices that support youth in recognizing the significance of their own and each other's creative contributions, a visibility to and with themselves and each other. (Alrutz 24)

In this passage, Alrutz elucidates two key components of an adult's youth-allyship. First, her reflections on her own ADT practice and youth-allyship harken back to the previous chapter's discussions of QYT facilitators' acknowledgment of, and attempts to mitigate, their own power and privilege when working with queer youth. Second, youth-allyship asserts the recognition and belief that youth have meaningful creative, social, and political contributions to offer each other and their communities; ADT and QYT practices can be a means of discovering and communicating these contributions.

I would assert that each facilitator I interviewed considers themselves a youth-allied adult. While none of my interlocutors used the term directly, the concept ran through descriptions of their practice. Speaking on the inception of *Webs*, Adam describes an example of a youth-driven process: "*The last two years we have started with a really weird anchor. Two years ago we started with the idea of witches because they were all watching American Horror Story and that's what they wanted to do. And this year they*

wanted to think about mythology.” Adam describes the use of myths in *Webs* as an anchor, essentially an idea, theme, or story that the ensemble can start to play with and devise around. This anchor is chosen by the youth participants, after which the facilitators (Adam works with a team of three other teaching-artists) identified four myths that might be of interest and, through exploration, the ensemble narrowed the focus down to Pisces and Arachne. The choice of the anchor and the direction the ensemble takes creatively with the anchor, as well as how they engage with it personally and artistically, is all driven by youth participants.

Instead of beginning with an external anchor such as mythology, Diana and Magenta both describe how their QYT play-making processes begin with issues or personal experiences their youth participants are interested in exploring. Diana’s ensemble meets once a week in the fall months; during this time they focus on ensemble-building and familiarization with theatre techniques and devising strategies such as improvisation. She continues,

In January we start meeting three days a week. That time is our creation period. So that’s where we go through all the topics that they’re interested in and we discuss them. We have on your feet engaging discussions as opposed to sitting down and just talking about things; we do activities around those topics to facilitate discussion with them. And then after the discussion they split off into groups and start creating some small scenes sometimes with some interesting parameters to get them to push themselves artistically a little further.

From this process, Diana and her co-facilitators pick out the one or two themes that seem to be central to the various scenes and propose this theme to the ensemble. Magenta describes using a similar process with her ensemble stating,

We try to start with community building first. So just getting them to share stories with each other about their lives. Then we ask them what they are interested in. They were invited to create workshops to lead for the whole ensemble around topics of interest to them. After about three weeks to a month, usually the fall, some portion of the fall is dedicated to learning devising techniques and talking about what we're interested in, and getting to know each other and then from that we're like "oh these are the thing that have come up a lot." Like this year mental health and sexual health in its broadest sort of form are thing that have come up repeatedly.

No matter the entry point, be it issues important to the youth such as mental and sexual health or topics that excite them such as witches or mythology, what is clear from Magenta's, Adam's, and Diana's accounts are that the youth participants generate, and drive discussions and scene-making around, the themes central to the QYT performance.

While youth-driven spaces and processes are key to QYT and created through various methods within QYT ensembles, broader challenges for youth leadership remain

within the structures of QYT programs. Since empowerment of queer youth through

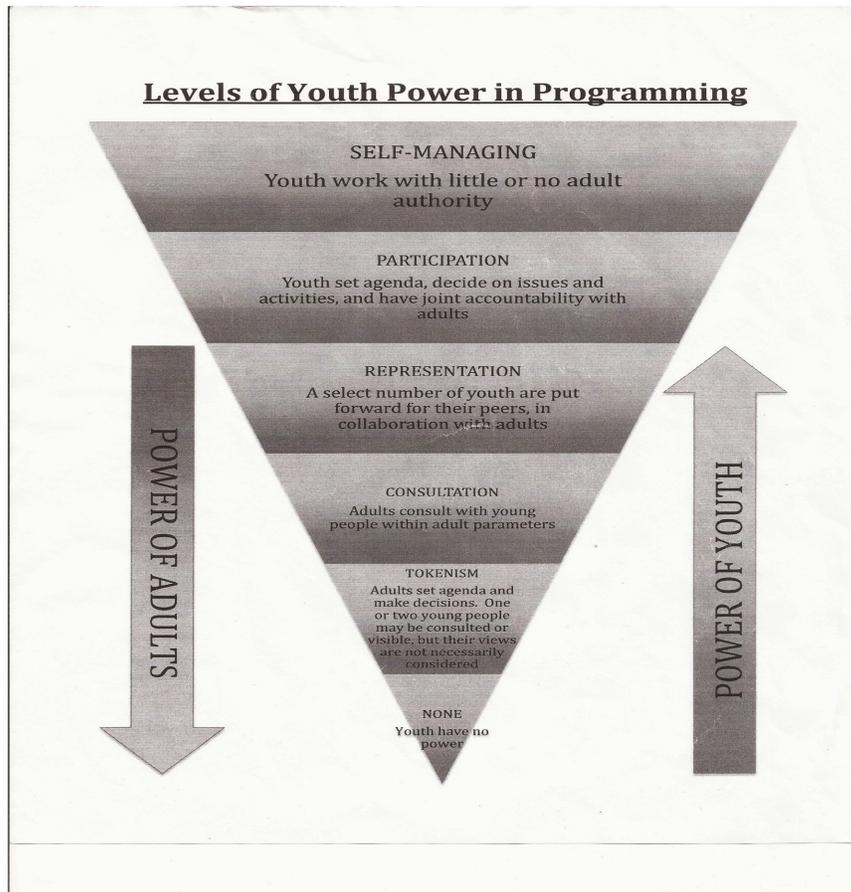


Figure 1

performance is the foundational goal of QYT it follows that creating youth-driven spaces and processes within QYT practice would be a priority for facilitators. A handout distributed at the Pride Youth Theatre Alliance Conference entitled “Levels of Youth Power in Programming” (see Figure 1) was used in one conference session to create brief scenes with attendees (including myself) about what these various levels of youth agency look like. While QYT facilitators were complimentary of the model, and embraced the concept of youth-driven space overall, several expressed frustration over how to implement greater youth agency both within their practices and also at an organizational

level. A rift appeared to form as the session progressed. On one side there were representatives of QYT organizations that had done, or felt they could, work toward increasing youth leadership in their organization's structure including youth led programs and inclusion on governing boards. On the other side were QYT programs housed in organizations that have education or youth outreach as piece of a broader mission statement, such organizations could include regional theatres or community centers for example. Facilitators of the latter group felt restricted in their capacity to include youth in the structure of the organization, or even sometimes in leadership roles within their QYT ensembles.

My interview with Sarah illuminates one challenge of youth-driven space/processes, namely the consistency and numbers of youth participants. A main theme of our conversation was the difficulty her QYT program has had in recruiting and keeping youth participants. After existing for three years their numbers still range from three to seven youth per school semester with little consistency of attendance. This is despite her QYT program being housed in a highly successful youth-arts organization that has popular school and community programs throughout the city and region where it is located. Sarah also reported hearing of other QYT ensembles with recruitment and retention issues. My other three interviewees reported robust attendance from ten to thirty participants per season, often with around five youth returning each year. This stability enables a more established set of practices and allows for greater youth leadership.

PROCESS VS. PRODUCT

The title of this section implies a binary. I am averse to binaries, but I find the exercise of inventing one here a useful analytical tool to probe tensions between the work being done with and by youth in a QYT process (which might also sometimes be called a rehearsal) and what the resulting product (or performance), if any, looks like. What provokes me here are several questions. What are the expectations placed on a QYT performance? What this product is expected to look like? Who might be doing this expecting, and why? I am also interested in the measures and evaluations necessary in ADT work. These evaluations may be used to make cases for funding, evidence community engagement, or demonstrate educational value. How do we understand QYT process and product in this light? How can this advance or hinder youth driven-space? Binaries also imply sides, stances, values. It would be disingenuous to suggest that my values do not color this section, but in teasing out tensions within this constructed binary it not my intention to condemn, rather I hope to think about exploring relationships and forging possible partnerships.

Tensions and questions surrounding the extent to which a QYT program can be youth-driven involve the values and objectives of multiple stakeholders including, but not limited to, participants, facilitators, heads of parent organizations in which QYT programs may be housed, and possible funders both of QYT programs and their parent organizations. All of the QYT programs described to me by facilitators through the survey and interviews work to expand youth agency within their practices to various degrees, especially in the performance generating and production processes. However,

one facilitator, in a conversation at the PYTA conference, expressed to me her frustration with the pyramidal “levels of youth power” model (figure 1) presented because it did not make room for her practice due to the nature and structure of the theatre in which her QYT program is housed. She applauded the model, and told me she had recently been able to incorporate a youth leadership component in her ensemble that allowed returning participants to mentor newcomers and take on more authority in the production. Her frustration stemmed from the model presented appearing to be at inexorable odds with the circumstances of her QYT program. Housed in a professional children’s theatre, this facilitator’s QYT program is just one piece of a larger organization that mounts a full season of performances geared toward young people. Time, space, budget, and a host of considerations all have to be negotiated within a broader theatre season. Additionally, while QYT most often works with youth untrained and perhaps wholly unfamiliar with theatre and is thus often labeled “amateur,” this facilitator expressed feeling held to a higher level of production and performance standards by her parent organization than a QYT program housed in an outreach center might. She suggested that ultimately there was only so much youth agency and autonomy this parent organization would allow before intervening.

For the purposes of this binary-based experiment, the description above is what I am calling a product-centered approach to QYT. A product-centered approach is one that emphasizes the final performance or production as the end goal of a QYT program. Product-centered performance places highest value on what happens onstage in front of an audience. I contrast this with a process-centered approach where the rehearsal and

everything leading up to production is given predominance; where the result is less important than the means and method used. To be cliché, it's not the destination, it's the journey.

With these contrasting modes I point here to what applied theatre theorist James Thompson describes as a tension between effect and affect. In *Performance Affects* Thompson argues for a reconsideration and revaluing of the ways in which performance is affective, by which he means evoking of “bodily responses, sensations, and aesthetic pleasures” (7). Thompson’s argument is a passionate one and speaks to the project I undertake here in numerous ways, the most salient of which here is his connection between the mechanisms of funding with a focus within applied theatre on producing demonstrable results. He argues,

In an area of arts practice often reliant on funding from non-arts bodies [including , applied theatre has inevitably both designed and described its repertoire in terms of social impact...Participation, or engagement with the arts more generally, is said to do things—to have certain identifiable effects. These claims, and the research mission to back them, have been the dominant framework for organizing and developing the work. (116)

Thompson hypothesizes a link between what he describes as applied theatre’s focus on evidentiary social impact and ADT’s necessary pursuit and subsequent justification for funding. Funds, and the philanthropic organizations that provide them, are by no means “the enemy,” for ADT or for Thompson. Instead I read Thompson’s forceful argument for a (re)evaluation of affect as an insistence that we must all, practitioners and scholars,

artists and teachers, arts-based and philanthropic organizations, (re)learn how to value the affective in art. We must find ways to make compelling arguments for the effect of affect, which may prompt new ways to argue for the vital importance of art, and specifically QYT.

While the tension between affect and effect is wrapped up in the process/product binary, it does not wholly account for the trepidation with the youth-driven model expressed by some facilitators. I posit this disquiet connects to what Muñoz describes, via the political theories Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, as the difference between performance with an “emphasis on means as opposed to ends” (*Cruising* 100). Performance, for Muñoz (and politics for Agamben), that focuses on ends fails because it tries to be all encompassing, it tries to show *the* way instead of *a* way. Conversely, “performances that display and illuminate their “means” are...a modality of performance that is aesthetically and politically linked to populism and amateurism. The performative work of “means”...is to interrupt aesthetics and politics that aspire toward totality” (*Cruising* 100). Muñoz uses punk performance—raw, messy, visceral, immediate—as an example of a means-based performance aesthetic. However, it is his linking of means based performance with “amateurism” that most directly speaks to a QYT aesthetic. Most QYT performance would be considered “amateur” because the work is typically done with youth who have little to no performance experience. Yet the aesthetics of QYT, which I would consider a theatre of means, are directly related to QYT’s utopian impulse because “an emphasis on means as opposed to ends is innately utopian insofar as utopia can never be prescriptive of futurity” (Muñoz *Cruising* 100). For Muñoz utopia is a form

of critique that reminds us there is “something missing, that the present is not enough” (100). If QYT does indeed offer the promise of a utopian critique, then its form follows its function, its amateur aesthetic is not an accident of circumstance but an intrinsic and essential part of the way it imagines possible futures.

For the purposes of teasing out some of the tensions around the affects and effects of QYT I have created a false binary between a process-based and a product-based approach toward QYT. I wish to trouble that binary since it is through both process and product, rehearsal and performance, that the world-building work of QYT occurs. Helen Nicholson reminds her readers that effect is not the enemy because “practitioners in applied theatre intend to make a difference” but instead problems arise when “the discourses and practices of performance management are dictating the ways in which creative practitioners are expected to work and so are undermining their role as artists” (*Applied* 57). I would extend this point further to suggest that those who suffer from managerial constraints are not only practitioners (i.e. facilitators), but also participants, in this case queer youth, who may experience limitations placed on their creative and leadership capacities within QYT. I am really refusing two binaries here, both that of process vs. product, and affect vs. effect. QYT programs can come in a multitude of forms, including those with and without a public performance. The determination of a given program’s structure should depend on the goals, methods, and values of all involved, especially participants, and that structure should attend to the specifics of place, culture, and difference with which that program intersects. By navigating these contours of form QYT can be both affective and effective. Perhaps more to the point, Thompson

notes that the affective can produce the effect; “social change is bound up in how we create, who creates and when we create art” (11). In other words the forms of QYT itself, the affects they produce in the queer youth who participate in them, are inexorably linked to the effects or goals facilitators hope to achieve. Jill Dolan describes this best in *Utopia in Performance* when she states, “the affective and ideological “doings” we see and feel demonstrated in utopian performatives also critically rehearse civic engagement that could be effective in the wider public and political realm” (7).

CONTROLLING THE NARRATIVE

By creating youth-driven spaces/performance practices that focus on collaborative partnerships between youth participants and facilitators, QYT offers a forum for queer youth to speak as the authorities of their own experiences thereby enabling queer youth to assert control over the narratives of their lives. As I have asserted in previous chapters, queer youth face constant generalizing and normalizing externally imposed narratives about their lives and identities. These narratives often either focus on queer youth as an “at-risk”²⁶ population with lives constantly marred by, or under threat of, crisis or make totalizing claims that “impose “healthy” normative ideals on youth in order to simplify their complexities for the sake of mainstream recognition” (Driver *Intro* 5). In her introduction to *Queer Youth Cultures*, Susan Driver demonstrates the harm inflicted upon

²⁶ While this term is still widely used in academic and government literature to define various populations that lack certain services or basic needs, I find it to be highly problematic because it is not value-neutral and often masks behavioral assumptions made about the groups to which it is applied. I hope for continued scholarship, like the work of Diane Conrad, which challenges the assumptions behind and continued use of the term “at-risk.”

queer youth by external narratives that fail to complicate the multitudinous lived experiences of queer youth. These totalizing narratives are entirely at the expense of youth who do not fall into the category of white, cis, middle to upper class, able-bodied young men.

It is important to note that external narratives about queer youth's lives are imposed through a plethora of social mediums including pop culture, news media, and education. Theatre is not exempt from this list; a 2008 study of published plays written for young audiences found that only seventeen plays contained homosexual themes or characters and that only *two* of the seventeen plays did not conform to what the study's authors term as the "troubled gay youth" trope (Water and Giannini 107, 115). In one particularly disturbing example, *A service for Jeremy Wong*, the play's queer "character" has already been beaten to death before opening scene, denying him any agency to define himself, instead he serves only as the issue that needs to be talked about, the problem (Water and Giannini 112-114). Theatre for young audiences (TYA) is a form that most commonly involves a pre-scripted play that can be performed either for or by young people. What this study of TYA implies is that the little queer content that exists within TYA accepts and perpetuates totalizing and mostly negative narratives of queer youth's lives. In this context, QYT can be considered a direct response to a deficit in theatrical representation of queer youth.

However, QYT addresses not just a problem of representation, but the much broader issue of authorship as well. By employing devised theatre making methods, by working to build queer youth-driven spaces, by exploring and celebrating difference

among and between queer youth, and by foregrounding queer youth experiences in both the creation and presentation of performance, QYT offers a means through which queer youth can tell and thus claim control of their own life narratives. I have already described how in three of my interviewee's QYT programs youth participants lead the selection of the central themes of the performance. Adam describes this further for *Webs* noting, "*we saw that everyone was really thinking about intersectionality and there were many people writing specifically black trans characters. And then there were also a lot of people wanting to talk about homelessness and housing.*" Adam also relates how participants became excited not only about the Arachne myth, but specifically about the word *web*, which led to discussion about how the play could incorporate social media with these other themes. *Webs* does indeed combine the threads of mythology; trans, specifically gender queer and non-binary, identities; black queer identities; and social media. This may seem a tall order for one play, and it is, but the crucial point is that the queer youth participants made the decisions about what and who should be their show's focus and that these stories were generated from their own experiences.

In *Webs*, the participants in this QYT program explore specific queer experiences by presenting diverse, nuanced, situated identities. Adam explains how while creating the script the majority of characters are written without race or gender markers. This allows any member of the ensemble to assume a role that interests them. Once the show is cast, identities are then written into to match the identities held by the ensemble member playing the role. For *Webs*, this caused a dilemma. With thirty youth participants, the decision had been made to double cast the play. Because the ensemble had been

interested in foregrounding the lives of black trans youth, the two central characters of the play were written with those identities from the outset. This meant, because of the identities in the ensemble, when the show was first cast the two adult ally characters (played by youth), who were written with no identity markers, ended up being white. TJ, the youth assistant director who is a person of color, expressed concern about creating yet another white savior narrative. The ensemble decided to recast the show to avoid, as Adam quoted the ensemble, “*watch[ing] another white teacher save a black homeless person.*” Adam explains that two ensemble members, four-year veterans of the program, talked openly with the group about their own experiences with homelessness for the first time this year. This sparked and guided the ensemble’s interest in including homelessness as a theme in *Webs*. The ensemble of *Webs* not only seized control of narratives governing their lives through performance, but they also chose, as a community, to focus on a particular set of intersecting identities which foregrounded the lives and experiences of marginalized voices within the queer community.

PERFORMING QUEER FUTURES: BUILDING UTOPIAS

A deep blue light permeates the stage so that the actors of *Webs* are visible only as shadows. On the projection screen we see an explosion of expanding light, perhaps a supernova, which leaves in its wake a star-scape that fills the back wall of the theatre. In unison a chorus of ensemble members announce: “My name is Sylvia Rivera,” after which a single actor continues to read excerpts of Rivera’s autobiography. During this reading a portrait of Rivera, drawn by a queer youth participant, is projected in the star-

scape. Another chorus exclaims, “My name is Marsha P. Johnson,” and another ensemble member begins reading the words of Johnson as her portrait, again a creation of participants, is projected into the stars. The words and memories of Johnson and Rivera dance together, briefly recounting Stonewall, their founding of STAR (the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) and the hardships they experienced and that other trans women of color still often face. Throughout this, Paris, one of *Webs*’ two central characters, can be seen in shadowy silhouette reading in the library. They are reading the zines that Casey, a librarian, has given them as an alternative to the Greek mythology Paris has been reading for school. Paris’s experience of reading the stories of Rivera and Johnson is mirrored in the live telling of those stories to the audience. As the scene ends, and the lights begin to change for the next scene, the two queer constellations of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera smile down at the performers and audience before fading from view.

The queer youth ensemble members of *Webs* create for themselves, and offer their audience, a queer mythology. Myths are origin stories; stories of how the world and its beauty, horror, mystery and many quirks came to be. Myths also tell tales of legendary beings, people who might inspire, and from whose flaws we could learn. The stories of Marsh P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera clearly resonate as legends to the queer youth of *Webs*. After reading about these women, Paris expresses the deep indignation that we never learn of Johnson or Rivera at school and yet there is an entire day devoted to Christopher Columbus. By using the form and stories of Greek myths to craft their own mythology, the queer youth of *Webs* engage in, what Munoz calls, disidentification.

Munoz creates this term to define the survival strategies minoritarian citizen subjects use to combat and “negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere” (*Disidentifications* 4). He explains further,

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded messages universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. (*Disidentifications* 31)

The devising process for *Webs* that Adam describes outlines the participants’ interest in mythology, but also their dismay at what they understood as the hetero/cisnormativeness of the Greek myths with which they engage. Their disidentification with the Greek myths used in the play allows the ensemble to both retool the myths as vehicles for their own stories, and to use mythology as a form through which they can root themselves in a knowable past, a past with a legacy of embodied telling, passed down orally—one in which they see themselves reflected instead of erased.

In *Webs*, not only is a queer mythology created and related about the past, but the two central characters, Logan and Paris, write myths for themselves as well. This further disidentification from the mythic form allows queer youth to directly tap into the form’s power of legend building, enabling them to make legends of themselves from their own stories. Towards the end of *Webs*, Paris tells their story to Logan. Paris’s myth is a sad one, full of longing for belonging and for home, for safety. Like many myths Paris’s is a cautionary tale. Its purpose in the play is to convince Logan to return home, Paris insists

that living on the street is not a better alternative to living with a father who doesn't accept you, that it should only be a choice when there is no other. Like so much material for this play, Paris's myth is derived from the ensemble's personal experiences. As such, the tale resonates beyond the confines of the theatre, serving as a myth—a warning and a hope—for other queer youth. When Paris finishes telling their myth Logan half offers, half asks “*it gets better?*” To this Paris firmly replies “*no,*” prompting Logan to apologize and jokingly say “*sorry the cis white gay narrative is not doing it for you today.*” To contextualize, the character of Logan is neither cis nor white, so it is understood that this narrative does not interest them either.

This moment points potently to a rift between youth experiences and imaginings, and homonormative logics that accept the present, logics that naively claim “it gets better” insisting queer youth “tough out” the present, logics that “rather than investing in children...invest in an assimilation that is forever over the rainbow” (Muñoz *Cruising* 55). It is true that Paris is asking Logan to “tough out” living with their father but the logic behind this suggestion is different than “it gets better.” Paris makes no such promise, saying instead “your dad's being a prick...and occasionally that's a thing that is going to happen.” Here the queer youth of *Webs* offer a sobering statement about the cost of survival. But also implicitly and explicitly woven throughout this scene, and the entire play, is a narrative of community and futurity. Muñoz argues, “Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough” (*Cruising* 96).

Webs is a powerful example of queer youth imagining a future for themselves, a future that is rooted in the past and performed in the present. In making this statement, I continue to find Muñoz's arguments for queerness as a modality of future possibility instructive. In *Cruising Utopia* Muñoz finds evidence for the potential of queerness' futurity in moments, especially performances, from the past. He describes this methodology as "a backwards glance that enacts a future vision" (4). I contest that *Webs* enacts a queer utopia. By combining myths both old and new, social media, and personal narratives, the queer youth creators of *Webs* perform a queer future here in the present that draws inspiration from a queer past. In the song "Home" which closes *Webs*, and the lyrics of which open this chapter, the queer youth composers' dream of stepping outside the boundaries and confines of the present. They link this possibility to a new idea of home, where home is anywhere they feel "wanted," "safe," and "the warmth of support" (Goblet and TheatriQ Youth). Like my grandmother did for me, Adam and his co-facilitators offered the space and tools of performance through which participants imagined what a queer future might look like for them, for me, for all of us.

THIS HOUSE DOESN'T HAVE A ROOF: A CONCLUSION

Given the lyrics and intentions of the song "Home," it may seem strange that I have organized this thesis around the notion of (re)building a house, especially a house connected to heteronormative notions of kinship (i.e. grandmother's house). In doing so I have attempted to position myself within this document, connecting my experience of feeling the "warmth of support" in my Grandmother's house through performance in my

skirt to the support of the tools and space of performance that QYT facilitators' offer queer youth through their practice. The space of safety, love, and support I found in my Grandmother's house, thanks to that extraordinary woman, both offers me a way into the work of QYT facilitators and marks my extreme privilege as a queer identified individual. It is precisely because of the tensions around kinship and family for queer identified folk that I find this metaphor of (re)building grandmother's house helpful and provocative. Queer folk have out of necessity built our own kinship networks, often even structured around the notion of a house and home, such as Marsha P. Johnson's and Sylvia Rivera's founding of STAR House which served as a home for homeless trans youth, especially trans youth of color, and was also deeply linked to family structure of black ball/ballroom culture, with Rivera and Johnson as mothers to the house. House and home is both a physical place of safety and support, but can also be internalized wellsprings of support carried with us and reenergized through community. By focusing on social justice, identity exploration/affirmation, community building, and arts exposure QYT facilitators' create with queer youth spaces to forge and explore alternative notions of home, kinship, and self that are affirmed and internalized through performance.

QYT performances privilege queer youth stories, experiences, lives, and imaginings, offering a utopian critique of the present where so many queer youth, especially queer youth of color and trans youth, are not allowed to survive. In doing this QYT is imbued with world-building potential, allowing queer youth to dream up potential futures that refuse the extinguishing logic of the present and, by staging those dreams, bring them into existence through performance. Like Jill Dolan suggests of

utopian performance, I argue QYT performances provide “moments of liminal clarity and communion, fleeting, briefly transcendent bits of profound human feeling and connection, spring from alchemy between performers and spectators and their mutual confrontation with a historical present that lets them imagine a different, putatively, better future” (*Utopia* 168). QYT performances create moments of an imagined future alive in the present, putting front and center the voices and imaginations of those who will have to live in the future, whatever it may hold. The queer youth creators of *Webs*, the example of QYT practice engaged with in this chapter, importantly understand and demonstrate through performance that “queerness is collectivity” (Muñoz *Cruising* 11). These youth imagine new possibilities for relationships and understandings through listening, sharing, learning, and celebrating difference in all its beautiful complexity by centering the experiences of those often most marginalized within their collective. Queer youth are imagining more just and varied worlds where boundaries are smudged, binaries are smashed, identities are forged, communities are found, and survival is possible. QYT provides the tools and space of performance for queer youth to proclaim these futures and in so doing pull them into the present.

This thesis has worked to illuminate the role of the facilitator in the work described above. By focusing on the goals, methods, and practice of QYT facilitators I have worked both to define a deliberately rough, permeable, and highly mutable outline to the form that is queer youth theatre, and to consider how, and extent to which, facilitators have conceived of and shaped this work. My intent has been to offer a step back, or a zoomed out view, of a fairly recent form of theatre practice that has received

little scholarly attention. This step back works to contextualize and situate the few case studies of individual companies and practices that have been generated on QYT within a broader field of practice. The focus on the work of QYT facilitators allows for deeper understandings of not only how facilitators' help shape QYT but also how they define it externally to funders and laypeople further delineating and defining the practice. Rather than minimizing the importance of youth, the focus on adult facilitators has enabled crucial demonstrations of the importance of youth in the work of QYT. Through analysis and interpretation of my survey results and four facilitator interviews I have suggested a set of common goals for QYT practice and pointed to similar methods used throughout many facilitators' work. I have also tried to demonstrate how these goals and methods inform facilitator practice by focusing on a particular facilitator's description of a performance building process and my own reading of that performance. Throughout I have viewed QYT through the lenses of queer theory, performance and applied theatre theory and critical pedagogy to assert queer youth theatre as a site of queer utopian performative imagining.

In writing this thesis I have built a house of QYT. This house's shape defies description, it seems to move when you look at it from different angles. I have tried to offer one picture of what this house might look like. I am convinced there are other pictures that might further shape this house allowing all those who so wish to comfortably inhabit it. This house I have built has many queer quirks but the queerest of all is that it has no roof. Instead of trying to neatly finish this house it remains open to the stars of possibility. In lieu of a roof I have questions which I am left with now that this

house is (in)complete. First, while this study has focused on facilitation, I remain deeply invested in learning more about the experiences of queer youth participants in QYT. I wonder how to best study those experiences and how to successfully privilege queer youth voices in the future academic literature about QYT. While in some ways queer youth theatre is a young practice, I remain curious about its origins and how it potentially grew from both applied theatre and queer performance traditions. A historicizing of QYT and the other ways in which queer youth have engaged in and with performance could lend new insights to QYT's forms and new possibilities for its practices. Finally for an applied theatre practice I have said little about the role of audience in QYT. ADT practices often include interactive or participatory elements with their audiences, however, this does not seem to be true for much of QYT practice where the audience's role is that of witness to the experiences and imaginings of queer youth. Further theorization on the role of the audience in QYT could importantly offer new insights for ADT into the different ways audiences can be seen as "participating."

Is It Enough?

Reflecting back on this study I am haunted by a particular moment of my interview process. The second to last question I asked in each of the four QYT facilitator interviews conducted for this study was about that facilitator's goals for their work. The final question I asked was: "why do you believe theatre is a way to achieve those goals?" I hoped to get at the heart of each of my interlocutors' passion and beliefs in/about their work. I received four beautiful responses to that question, but Magenta Davenport's

stands out. Her immediate response was “*I don’t know if it [theatre] is anymore. It’s not enough, I guess, is what I mean.*” She then went on to deliver a stunning defense of why theatre and the sharing of our stories is fundamental to the human experience and to creating social change. Yet still, Magenta asserted, the work of QYT by itself is not enough. She perceives a rift between theatre’s success at affecting and effecting people on an individual level and theatre’s broader ability to effect systemic change. In some ways Magenta is right, QYT alone is not enough. We must continue to build intersectional coalitions to collectively combat all axes of oppression. However, QYT is a start, is one start, one way to forge those communities, one way to defiantly proclaim and celebrate our beautiful uniqueness, our queerness in whatever form, and in so doing find points of connection with others, one way to demand a future that all queer youth, *all of them*, hold the promise of surviving long enough to see. I believe queer youth theatre provides space and tools for queer youth to imagine their own futures and thus create them. Why? Well, you see dear reader, because when I was six, I asked my grandmother to make me a skirt—and she did.

Appendix A



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SUPPORT
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

P.O. Box 7426, Austin, Texas 78713 · Mail Code A3200
(512) 471-8871 · FAX (512) 471-8873

FWA # 00002030

Date: 03/15/16
PI: Samuel N Blake
Dept: Theatre and Dance
Title: The Methods, Goals, and Stories of Queer Youth Theatre
Facilitators
Re: IRB Expedited Approval for Protocol Number 2015-09-0141

Dear Samuel N Blake:

In accordance with the Federal Regulations the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the above referenced research study and found it met the requirements for approval under the Expedited category noted below for the following period of time: 03/15/2016 to 03/14/2017. *Expires 12 a.m. [midnight] of this date.* If the research will be conducted at more than one site, you may initiate research at any site from which you have a letter granting you permission to conduct the research. You should retain a copy of the letter in your files.

Expedited category of approval:

- 1) Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met. (a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review). (b) Research on medical devices for which (i) an investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; or (ii) the medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.
- 2) Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows: (a) from healthy, non-pregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; or (b) from other adults and children², considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.
- 3) Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by non-invasive means.
Examples:
 - (a) Hair and nail clippings in a non-disfiguring manner.
 - (b) Deciduous teeth at time of exfoliation or if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction;
 - (c) Permanent teeth if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction.

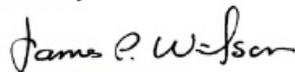
- (d) Excreta and external secretions (including sweat).
 - (e) Uncannulated saliva collected either in an un-stimulated fashion or stimulated by chewing gumbase or wax or by applying a dilute citric solution to the tongue.
 - (f) Placenta removed at delivery.
 - (g) Amniotic fluid obtained at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor.
 - (h) Supra- and subgingival dental plaque and calculus, provided the collection procedure is not more invasive than routine prophylactic scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques.
 - (i) Mucosal and skin cells collected by buccal scraping or swab, skin swab, or mouth washings.
 - (j) Sputum collected after saline mist nebulization.
- 4) Collection of data through non-invasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications).
Examples:
- (a) Physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy.
 - (b) Weighing or testing sensory acuity.
 - (c) Magnetic resonance imaging.
 - (d) Electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography.
 - (e) Moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.
- 5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).
Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.
- 6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- 7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.
Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.
- Use the attached approved informed consent document(s).
- You have been granted a Waiver of Documentation of Consent according to 45 CFR 46.117 and/or 21 CFR 56.109(c)(1).
- You have been granted a Waiver of Informed Consent according to 45 CFR 46.116(d).

Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:

1. Report immediately to the IRB any unanticipated problems.
2. Submit for review and approval by the IRB all modifications to the protocol or consent form(s). Ensure the proposed changes in the approved research are not applied without prior IRB review and approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject. Changes in approved research implemented without IRB review and approval initiated to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject must be promptly reported to the IRB, and will be reviewed under the unanticipated problems policy to determine whether the change was consistent with ensuring the subjects continued welfare.
3. Report any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of subjects to continue to participate.
4. Ensure that only persons formally approved by the IRB enroll subjects.
5. Use only a currently approved consent form, if applicable.
Note: Approval periods are for 12 months or less.
6. Protect the confidentiality of all persons and personally identifiable data, and train your staff and collaborators on policies and procedures for ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of subjects and their information.
7. Submit a Continuing Review Application for continuing review by the IRB. Federal regulations require IRB review of on-going projects no less than once a year a reminder letter will be sent to you two months before your expiration date. If a reminder is not received from Office of Research Support (ORS) about your upcoming continuing review, it is still the primary responsibility of the Principal Investigator not to conduct research activities on or after the expiration date. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted, reviewed and approved, before the expiration date.
8. Upon completion of the research study, a Closure Report must be submitted to the ORS.
9. Include the IRB study number on all future correspondence relating to this protocol.

If you have any questions contact the ORS by phone at (512) 471-8871 or via e-mail at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Sincerely,



James Wilson, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

Appendix B

The following is a copy of the survey administered to QYT facilitators. The questions are identical and in the same order asked on the survey, however, when built in Qualtrics the look of the survey was different. Unlimited text fields were provided for all but the two questions asking facilitators to mark their answers.

Queer Youth Theatre Facilitator Survey

What is the current organization you work for?

What is that organization's mission?

How long have you been working for/in a QYT program?

In the table below please mark any term(s) you use to define your work within QYT. If you use multiple terms please mark them all.

Terms	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Director	<input type="checkbox"/>
Facilitator	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practitioner	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching Artist	<input type="checkbox"/>
Theatre Educator	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

If "other" was marked, please specify any additional term(s) here:

Please describe what your role or function entails within your QYT ensemble. How do the terms listed above relate to that role?

Do you identify as a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual community?

How, if at all, does this identification impact your work within QYT?

Please discuss any other identity markers that you feel inform or impact your work in QYT (This could include but is not limited to age, race, education, socio-economic background).

How is your QYT program structured and why?

How many participants do you have on average in your program?

Do participants typically return for multiple sessions/seasons?

Please describe a typical rehearsal or session process.

In the table below please mark any of the methods listed that guide or inform your work with your QYT ensemble:

Methodologies	X
Applied Theatre	
Boal Techniques	
Creative Drama	
Digital Storytelling	
Drama Based Pedagogy	
Sociodrama	
Spolin based Improvisation	
Theatre for Dialogue	
Theatre in Education	
Youth Theatre	
Other	

If you marked other please list additional methods here:

Why do you find these particular methods helpful to frame and/or use in your work in QYT?

What specific activities do you draw from these methods and how do you use them in with your QYT ensemble?

What are your goals for the participants in your QYT ensemble?

How, if at all, is the achievement of your goal(s) measured?

Why do you believe theatre is a useful way to help participants achieve these goals?

How did you come to be doing this work within QYT?

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