

Developing a Feminist Pedagogy: A Self-Study of
Empowerment through Mentorship
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ABSTRACT

This research charts the process of empowerment of a young artist, the researcher, through feminist pedagogy and theatre creation, using narrative inquiry as methodology. The research is focussed on the Montreal-based, non-profit theatre production company, Imago Theatre, specifically within the Artista program, Imago's free theatre mentorship program for young women 16 to 21 years old. The outcome of this narrative investigation is an emerging feminist pedagogy, specific to Artista's theatre mentorship and training environment. Data manifests as narrative scenes, each inspired by short memories of resistances faced by the researcher in their role as Artista's Program Director and in their trajectory towards becoming a professional theatre artist and creator. The self-reflexive process of writing these narrative scenes involved the recollection and recreation of memories to make teaching instincts visible, interrogate these habits, and reconsider the pedagogical approach to more effectively empower Artista's young participants and build an intergenerational community of emerging and established women theatre artists in Montreal. These values of community-building and exchange are inherent to the the mandate of the Artista program. Findings are placed in conversation with feminist theory, critical pedagogy, engaged pedagogy and collective creation practices to arrive at the four pillars of the emerging feminist pedagogy composed of Resistance/Empowerment, Storytelling, Collective Creation and Self-Actualization.

To my greatest teachers:

My parents, Sharon and James Ross-Jones, my love, Michael Dyck,
and my artistic guide, Micheline Chevrier.

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INTRODUCTION: Benefiting from Theatre Mentorship

Research Question

This research charts a process of empowerment through feminist pedagogy and theatre creation. At the outset of writing an MA thesis in Art Education, I wondered how my own lived experience as co-creator and program director of Artista—a free feminist theatre training and mentorship program founded by the Montreal-based Imago Theatre—had functioned to empower me, as well as shape my approach to pedagogy as a theatre practitioner. This thesis explores that question through narrative inquiry and asks: how can feminist practice and theory shape artistic pedagogy and support young artists?

Since its inception in 2014, Artista has become an annual part of Imago Theatre's activity. Artista takes the shape of an annual, 15 week-long, weekly program involving a team of two program directors, three artist mentors, two guest teachers and 15 women between the ages of 16 and 21 selected from a pool of applicants based on the diversity of their perspectives. Artista is funded in part by Imago Theatre's operational grants, the Foundation of Greater Montreal, the RBC Foundation, the Evenko Foundation, the Telus Foundation, and a small pool of private donors. Artista's goals are to empower the ensemble of young women and nourish an intergenerational community of theatre artists through the following activities: theatre training (movement, voice, improvisation, ensemble building, mask and dance), theatre creation, mentorship from professional artists, shared meals, and outings to see professional productions around the city. Artista culminates in a one-hour performance collectively created by participants with support from their artist mentors, inspired by original storytelling and dialogue centered around a specific theme, which is selected by the team in anticipation of each annual session.

My research takes the form of a self-reflexive journey investigating my memories of co-creating and directing Artista to identify moments of learning that led myself and the Artista team to shape the program into its current state. This research allows me to articulate my own pedagogical ideologies, which have grown alongside Artista. Artista and my own pedagogy have grown over the past four years in response to so much: collaborations with the various

artists involved in the program as mentors, guest artists, and program directors; collaborations with the participants in the three annual sessions to date; in response to the overarching feminist mandate of Imago Theatre; in dialogue with the artistic and collaborative sensibilities of Imago's Artista Director, Micheline Chevrier; and in response to my own artistic interests and practices as a theatre creator and performer. In the following thesis, I recall the narrative of my empowerment and growth as Artista's program director and articulate the process of shaping the pedagogy of the program based.

Rationale for this Research

My curiosity to explore Artista's learning environment as a site of inquiry stems from personal experiences of perspective gaining and consciousness raising obtained through theatre training and moments in collective creation environments. Performing gave me an opportunity to make my voice heard by others, and to experience what Spivak (1990) calls *Darstellung*, "tread[ing] in someone's shoes," and thus offering an opportunity to inhabit another's identity and lived experiences (p. 109). My own learning as a theatre student and practitioner have spurred me to offer this opportunity to others, specifically other young women, to gain confidence in their own voices the same way I did, and continue to do. Theatre is astutely positioned to offer its practitioners this journey.

In recent years, I have become aware of the power of mentorship through first hand experience receiving support and advice from professional theatre artists. While working at Imago Theatre, I have been supported by established artists in the Montreal theatre community, namely Micheline Chevrier (Artistic Director of Imago Theatre), Emma Tibaldo (Artistic and Executive Director of Playwrights' Workshop Montreal), Myrna Wyatt-Selkirk (Theatre Professor at McGill University, Theatre Director), and James McGee (Artistic Director of Montreal Improv Theatre), to name a few. These mentors are people to whom I ask questions regarding my career, share my insecurities, and bounce creative ideas off. The influence of these mentors in my life and on my professional trajectory has been significant, highlighting the importance of Artista offering our young participants a space to nourish genuine bonds with their mentors. The influence of mentors on my life has also inspired me to take the opportunity within this thesis to identify moments of mentorship that have shaped my artistic pedagogy.

As a woman, the journey towards my vocation is challenged by inequities which follow women and other non-dominant individuals from a young age. As Ahmed (2015) asserts, sexism is alive and well and must be addressed with positive, feminist¹ action. Gender inequality manifests in Canada in various forms, including in women's wages: the average wage for women in all job tenures was calculated in 2014 to be 68.4% of men's average earnings (Gender Equality). We are confronted with expectations of gender from a young age (Adichi, 2014), which is why Artista's target demographic are young women aged 16 to 21. Artista attempts to create a judgement-free space where conversations about gender and artistry can unfold; it builds a platform for young women to encounter resistances² and overcome them, finding greater strength in their senses of identity and the confidence to make their voices heard.

Artista History and Themes

Imago Theatre is a feminist theatre production company in Montreal whose mandate is to be "a catalyst for conversation, an advocate for equal representation and a hub for stories about unstoppable women."³ This mandate is achieved through the following events that punctuate Imago Theatre's annual cycle of activity, which includes one main-stage production, one festival, and Artista, the mentorship program in discussion in this thesis.

Imago Theatre has been under the Artistic Direction of director Micheline Chevrier since 2013, when she took on the position after 12 years of leadership by Clare Schapiro. Imago Theatre was founded in 1987 by Andres Hausman. It was at the junction of Clare Schapiro and

¹ I acknowledge Spivak's (1990) notion of strategic essentialism, recognizing that all women and feminists are in possession of their own "sovereign deliberative consciousness" (p. 109), but that for the purposes of achieving gender equity, it is useful to essentialise these individuals into larger, overarching groups who work towards similar goals.

² Resistance is referred to by Anne Bogart in *A Director Prepares* (2001) as "discord and discomfort" or the "instant we feel challenged by circumstances." The performance and theatre creation exercises Artista offers are intended to challenge participants. The conversations we have as a group of program directors, mentors and participants provide a space to interrogate these challenging moments of discomfort, and the support of the group intends to strengthen participants to overcome these challenges (p. 141).

³ Imago Theatre's manifesto reads: We advance Her Side of the Story through theatre that advocates for equal participation and representation for women and marginalized groups. We advance equality, social justice and Her Side of the Story through post-show talkbacks that encourage meaningful conversation and exchange. We develop Her Side of the Story through Artista, our free theatre arts mentorship program for young women, and also by providing mentorship opportunities and artistic residencies for emerging and established theatre artists from a variety of disciplines (acting, playwriting, directing, artistic direction and arts administration). We democratize access to Her Side of the Story through our Pay-What-You-Decide initiative and by ensuring that all our events take place in spaces that are physically accessible to all. We tell Her Side of the Story through theatre about unstoppable women with urgent stories that challenge and galvanize audiences (Imago Theatre Manifesto, <http://www.imagotheatre.ca/about-imago/>).

Micheline Chevrier's Artistic Directions that Imago Theatre articulated its feminist mandate, an ongoing process with the growth of the company to the present day.

Artista, Imago Theatre's free theatre program for young women⁴ 16 to 21 years old, emerged in 2014 as part of Imago's annual cycle of activity to expand Imago Theatre's feminist mandate into the community sector. Artista builds and empowers a community of Montreal young women and supports them through the early stages of their careers, whatever those may be (Artista Mandate). Artistic independence and confidence, as well as increased knowledge in artistic craftsmanship are acquired through mentorship, creative collaboration and professional performance training. Artista's goal is to nourish a growing community of empowered, women artists and thinkers and encourage them through theatre training to find confidence in their crafts and carve out a space for their voices and passions in their communities.

Artista aims to empower participants through theatre training and nourish an intergenerational community of women theatre artists. To think more carefully about the meaning of the term, "empowerment," I draw on theatre director Anne Bogart's (2001) exploration of Paulo Freire's (2000) notion of consciousness and being in the world: I take empowerment to involve the practice of identifying and overcoming personal resistances⁵ to engage in the continuous process of becoming a conscious being.⁶ Artista's activities include theatre training, one-on-one mentorship with established theatre artists, discussions over food, outings to see professional productions, and an opportunity to create and perform their own original creations for an audience.

As co-creator and Program Director of Artista, I have collaborated with a diverse team of theatre artists from 2014 to the present day to offer participants a more specific and effective experience and a sense of belonging to a community. The growth of Artista over four years has been remarkable. The number of participants per annual session is one marker of growth: in

⁴ The Artista team considers the applications of all individuals who apply, including individuals who are gender non-binary and trans as we employ an inclusive use of the word 'woman' and celebrate that Artista is a feminist space that champions intersectionality, which according to Kimberlé Crenshaw's intention in coining the term, is a space where race, class and gender are inseparable from one another in composing identity and shaping lived experience. Sara Ahmed discusses Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality in her theory, furthering the definition by adding that gender, race, class, ability, culture and ethnicity cannot be separated from one another. Individuals must be holistically acknowledged in order to fully understand and dissect systems of dominance and marginalization (Ahmed, 2017).

⁵ Resistance is referred to by Bogart (2001) as "discord and discomfort" or the "instant we feel challenged by circumstances" (p. 141).

⁶ Consciousness, according to Freire (2000) refers to "knowledge [that] emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other" (p. 53).

2014, we had five young women apply to the program; in 2016, our second session, we had eight; and by the third and most recent session, we selected 15 young women from an applicant pool of 22 to join the program.

This quantitative marker of growth, however, does not provide insight into the qualitative elements of Artista's growth, which is why I am examining my own narrative account—"memory fragments"⁷—of my experiences with Artista to study how I have worked collaboratively with artists to develop a pedagogical practice. These fragments offer a reflexive space through which to examine my experiences of Artista and place in conversation with feminist and pedagogic theory in order to shed light on how the evolution of the program has empowered me as an artist and teacher.

Methods

My research will engage auto-ethnographic, phenomenological and narrative inquiry methodology to investigate the moments in Artista that shaped the program, and articulate the evolution of my own pedagogical growth as Artista's program director. Phenomenology (van Manen, 1997), auto-ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 1996), and narrative inquiry (Palucci, 2000) are complementary within my field of research as they aim to examine context and the complexity of real-life experiences, and describe and interpret them with depth and richness.

I employ writing as a method of inquiry guided by Max van Manen's (1997) phenomenology, inspired by auto-ethnographic texts compiled and edited by Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (1996), and narrative inquiry as per Piera Palucci's (2000) thesis *The Emergence of an Art Education Philosophy Through a Personal Narrative Inquiry*. These methods do not seek to explain, but rather understand, and as Fraleigh (1991) elaborates, "to increase one's thoughtfulness and practical resourcefulness or tact" (p. 4), and "to become more fully a part of it, or better, to become the world" (p. 5). My own narrative, composed of what Palucci calls "memory fragments" (p. iii), allows me to interrogate how my lived experiences informs my pedagogical instincts within the Artista program.

⁷ Piera Palucci (2000, p. iii) describes "memory fragments" as reconstructions of her own memories, which when placed in sequence, compose a narrative.

Phenomenological methodology is appropriate for my research given that I ground my work in lived experience. I am interested in exploring Artista's complex social dynamics and context, and from these explorations, articulating rich descriptions and insightful explanations of my experiences. van Manen regards a teacher's experience as a "life-world sensitive text"⁸ and a source of data. These texts describe the author's situatedness in a context and are "based on the belief that we can best understand human beings from the experiential reality of their lifeworlds" (xi). Like Palucci's memory fragments, van Manen's life-world sensitive texts are descriptions of the author's lived experiences and memories, mined through this process as sites of knowledge. This process of writing the narrative inquiry of Artista's pedagogical evolution, and my own stories of encountering resistances throughout this process, is revelatory of how my lived experiences have influenced my pedagogical practice and empowered me.

In Chapter One, I articulate Artista's current state, contextualize the program within Imago Theatre, and situate its activities and goals within similar theatre and performance training and mentorship programs that also have a mandate to empower their participants. In Chapter Two, I weave my memory fragments into a narrative, drawing from challenging and rewarding experiences as co-creator and program director of Artista during the 2014, 2016, and 2017 Artista sessions. In Chapter Three, I place this narrative in conversation with feminist and critical pedagogy in order to articulate my own Artista-specific pedagogical practice and discuss my own empowerment through this process. Reflecting on Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects and Others* (2006), I orient myself to gaze towards my lived experiences involving various artist and former Artista participants. I acknowledge that what I describe is filtered through the lens of my own subjectivity and positionality. These descriptions will be approximations mediated by time and the creativity of memory.

Finally, I will place my findings in conversation with collective creation ideologies to situate Artista's pedagogy within a larger history of feminist theatre creation. Collective creation emerged as a feminist theatre creation method where the creative outcome is influenced by the process of collaboration and shaped by the perspectives and interests of various artists involved. Feminist practitioners rethought the group process including "how work was to be

⁸ van Manen (1997) describes lifeworld texts as insightful descriptions of lived experiences before they are classified and abstracted (p. 8). He elaborates on the connection between lived experience and life-world sensitive texts: "In other words, the world is given to us and actively constituted by us: reflecting on it phenomenologically, we may be presented with possibilities of individual and collective self-understanding and thoughtful praxis" (xi).

created, how discussions were to be made, how conflicts were to be aired and resolved, along the lines that felt truer to women's preferred manner of relating to the world," which was in itself a political action (Syssoyeva and Proudfit, 2013, p. 20). As collective creation can inhabit many forms and methodologies, it is important to say that Artista's environment latches predominately onto the goal of lateral working dynamics while taking into account the enhanced decision making power of myself, Artista's program director, and beyond that, Micheline's input as Artistic Director of Imago Theatre.

Borrowing from these methodologies, I reconstruct my memories of the past, and situate myself as the lens on the program (Kershaw, 2011). Despite my best efforts to enter into conversation objectively, I have curated the selection of stories that feature as data and acknowledge this limit. Aiming for transparency I acknowledge my position as a Venezuelan-Canadian, cisgendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, white woman. Artistically, I identify as a performer and theatre creator. As a pedagog, I coordinate, collaborate, facilitate and guide my participants. Within Artista, I wear the titles of co-creator and program director. These various lenses will be active and intersect in my research.

Significance

My research has potential wide and narrow reaches. I will start broadly and hone in towards the lived experience of individuals who have been involved and will be involved with Artista in the future. The vocabulary and structure I use to describe Artista might serve to inspire other similar women-specific, intergenerational, theatre mentorship initiatives. As acknowledged by Ahmed (2015), gender inequity is still prevalent and insidious within our systems of power distribution, and therefore women-specific empowerment programs are a relevant tool of positive, intersectional, feminist action (Ahmed, 2017) to build strong communities and battle sexism. I hope that my research might become a part of this ongoing conversation about gender equity.

My research does not intend to create generalizable findings that can be applied to other theatre training environments. Rather it situates itself specifically within the context of the Artista program investigating its growth from 2014 - 2017. My context specific approach weighs heavily on the side of articulations of memory to illuminate my findings, which will

require that readers adopt an open, emotionally engaged approach to reading and internalizing my research. While I do believe that my research documents various positive impacts including personal growth and increased confidence for participants and the team members, Artista's learning environment does not intend to provide a solution to gender inequity. Rather, by creating a space where participants can question and exercise their sense of individual and group identity and engage in collaboration as a process towards creation and performance, we hope that participants feel a sense of empowerment and a sense of belonging in a supportive, brave community (Syssoyeva & Proudfit, 2013).

Additionally, Artista nurtures the next generation of women artists, who as a result of our pedagogy will continue to nurture their own critical consciousness in the way they engage with their communities (Freire, 2000). Here I tread into the world of the immeasurable and the unknowable. My hope is that Artista participants will more confidently pursue their life dreams, and given their experiences of mentorship in the Artista program, be likely to nurture this legacy and become mentors for the next generation of young women artists whose paths they will cross paths in the future, continuing to nourish intergenerational mentorship and friendship.

van Manen (1997) articulates that love is the source that inspires the quest for knowledge. This situates me in my research pursuit; I am in love with a program that has real and expansive effects on its participants, and I am curious to know how we as a team of mentors and program directors have shaped the program as it exists now and how I, as an artist and teacher, have grown along the way. This journey requires that I overcome many personal resistances and that I engage with many "sweaty concepts"⁹ (Ahmed, 2017). I foresee that the phenomenological, auto-ethnographic, narrative portion of my research will require intense attention to the specificity and nuance of lived experience. I anticipate that this process of articulating my lived experiences will be empowering and useful in my trajectory towards my pedagogical and artistic endeavours.

Like Jenny Hughes and Karen Wilson (2011), I am interested in remedying the lack of scholarly conversation around the topic of the empowering effects of theatre programs, specifically ones that operate in women-specific environments. I believe my articulations of Artista's growth can provide inspiration and insight into a model of learning has not been

⁹ Sara Ahmed explains that sweaty concepts are "generated by practical experience of coming up against a world, or the practical experience of trying to transform a world" (2017, p. 44).

discussed within scholarly writings. My research might become pertinent for other theatre teachers and facilitators who seek to empower young women and other non-dominant individuals through theatre.

My research process will also be a pertinent journey towards my personal self-actualization as prescribed by teachers and theorists bell hooks (1994) and van Manen (1997). Personal empowerment inspired by deep self-reflexivity, as well as the experience of designing and implementing the Artista curriculum in 2018, will offer a deeper understanding of, and engagement with the Artista program. These personal benefits will reverberate in my own personal life as a teacher and as a performer, while the adaptations to the Artista program resulting from this process of self-reflexivity will benefit the young women who will continue to engage with the program in the future.

CHAPTER ONE: Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework is shaped primarily by pedagogical and feminist theory offered by bell hooks (1994), Paulo Freire (2000), Sarah Ahmed (2015, 2017), Anne Bogart (2001), Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (2013). The strong artistic practices and theories of myriad theatre practitioners, including Micheline Chevrier, Imago Theatre's Artistic Director, underpin much of my teaching.

Artista's learning environment champions storytelling as a community building tool and approaches its feminism through an intersectional lens. I am therefore interested in bell hooks' (1994) engaged pedagogy which strives towards intersectional empowerment of learners, community building, lateral relationships, collective learning, and personal storytelling as learning tools. hooks' engaged pedagogy takes inspiration from Paulo Freire's (2000) critical pedagogy¹⁰, which I will also examine and refer to within my feminist theoretical framework. Ahmed's (2015, 2017) feminist theory grounds my theoretical approach in the present day drive for social justice. Anne Bogart's articulation of resistance¹¹, in addition to collective theatre creation methods as articulated by Syssoyeva and Proudfit (2013), situate these learning models within a theatrical creation process.

hook's (1994) engaged pedagogy articulates that education is a practice of freedom. Artista strives for this kind of education and benefits from hook's (1994) assertion of excitement as a central condition to inspire learning. In order for excitement, engagement and commitment, and not boredom, to prevail in a learning space, several pedagogical elements must be activated. Among these: pleasure should result from learning; teachers and facilitators must engage with students according to their individual needs; learners must feel valued for their individual contributions to the learning space; and learners' lived experiences should be mined as sites of knowledge and inquiry. Additionally, and of particular interest to me, teachers must constantly be striving towards self-actualization. On this note, hooks elaborates:

¹⁰ hooks (1994) critiques the gendered, sexist language Freire's (2000) uses in his explanations of critical pedagogy (default use of male pronouns, and thus men's empowerment through liberatory education). Nevertheless, she is inspired by the work and considers it a valuable and necessary part of the conversation around education as a practice of freedom.

¹¹ "A necessary ingredient to the creative process" (Bogart, 2001, p. 138).

Progressive, holistic education, ‘engaged pedagogy’ [...] emphasizes well-being. This means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students (p. 15).

This approach to teaching factors into my own process of becoming a more effective pedagog within the context of Artista, in terms of offering a more empowering, community building experience through theatre training and mentorship.

Freire’s (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* contributed to hooks’ articulation of the engaged pedagogy framework. Freire offers problem posing education, a model of education where hierarchy between teachers and students is diminished, and thus teacher-students and student-teachers work collaboratively as critical co-investigators of their worlds. Problem posing education is offered as an antidote to the banking system of education, where teachers deposit knowledge to passive students, receptacles of this learning. Freire’s liberatory education acknowledges that schools enact hierarchical structures that mimic systems of oppression in society at large. Therefore, creating lateral learning environments in schools empowers learners to question systems of oppression active in their surroundings and become more likely to be agents of change in their communities.

Sarah Ahmed’s (2015, 2017) texts, “Introduction: Sexism - A problem with a name” and *Living a Feminist Life* are contemporary markers of feminist theory that purport the importance of relentless, positive, intersectional, feminist action. Ahmed identifies that sexism is still a prevalent system of dominance that must be acknowledged and discussed within academic circles in order to diminish it.

Like hooks (1994), Ahmed (2015) promotes intersectional feminism and places emphasis on identifying and naming sexism in all the spheres it manifests to decipher why it remains persistent in “shaping worlds, determining possibilities, deciding futures, despite decades of feminist activism” (p. 5). Ahmed stresses the importance of calling out sexism; she writes,

To name something as sexist is not only to modify a relation by modifying our understanding of that relation; it is also to insist that further modification is required (p. 9).

Instead of assigning sexism as the unique perception of the individual calling it out, it must be acknowledged as a systemic problem of gender inequity. This common misdirection of negative attention towards the person naming sexism causes “feminist exhaustion,” allowing for the “spring back” mechanism, where despite progress made towards social justice, things quickly reverse to how they were before (Ahmed, 2017, p. 6). Ahmed (2015) identifies sexism as a negative critique, while feminism is a positive, constructive project aiming at creating alternatives. Building on this conversation about naming sexism, she also offers habits for incorporating feminist values into daily life. She offers,

“Feminist homework,” an action where we investigate, sweep and scourge all of the spaces we inhabit with a feminist lens. The process is thorough, imagining that once sexism is identified in the spaces, action can be taken to rebuild a more equitable society. This practice can build feminism into “multiple and diverse existences” (p.1).

Feminist homework embodies a practice of positive, feminist action. Ahmed draws thin the line between personal and political, political and theoretical, celebrating the power of inspiring political action and theoretical articulations with personal lived experiences and the storytelling resulting therein.

Ahmed (2017) also offers the vocabulary of “sweaty concepts” (p. 44) and “space invaders” (p. 33), which are useful tools for me as I uphold a feminist praxis within Artista’s learning environment. These concepts become visible when we, as non-dominant individuals, (women, people of colour, queer people, differently abled individuals, etc.) enter spaces not designed or intended for us. Bravely entering a space designed for dominant individuals as an ‘other’ is an example a resistances, which Ahmed encourages us to encounter and work through. Feminist theory can be a useful tool throughout this process of encountering, and is most effective the closer the theory is written to our skin, in other words, the closer it is written to the lived experiences of our non-dominant bodies.

Ahmed’s (2006) articulation of ‘orientation’ allows me to better understand the way that I take perspective *on* Artista as its Program Director, and *within* Artista as a member of this feminist theatre community, which orients itself towards the world. Firstly, I orient myself

towards the participants of Artista as Program Director, viewing them from this position of looking towards the participants. Ahmed explains,

We can begin here to rethink how groups are formed out of shared direction. To put this in simple terms, a “we” emerges as an effect of a shared direction towards an object (p. 118).

In repeatedly directing myself towards the Artista participants, they become the objects of my attention which I look towards. I also share an orientation with the participants as a woman participating in Artista; Artista is comprised of program directors, mentors, participants, all unified by our interest in feminism, theatre and our owning of the label of ‘woman.’ Ahmed explains that “It is through a repetition of a shared direction that collectives are made,” and indeed, Artista gazes out towards the world as a collective (p. 118).

Ahmed’s theory of orientation posits that objects in the world are available for bodies to act upon. When a non-dominant body becomes racialized by the dominant gaze, that is, a black body racialized by a white gaze, that body becomes limited in its capacity to reach out to act upon objects. Ahmed explains, “Objects extend bodies, certainly, but they also seem to measure the competence of bodies and their capacity to “find their way” (p. 110). All bodies are born free to act upon objects, but the gaze placed on them from the outside limits their capacity of “what is and what is not within reach” (p. 112). Ahmed’s articulation of orientation, specifically orienting towards non-dominant bodies heightens my sensitivity in the way I orient myself towards my memories of the Artista participants, and weave together my narrative of memories. I must be aware of the effect of my orientation from the body I inhabit towards the participants’ young, non-dominant, gendered, and often racialized bodies. I also take this concept of orientation into consideration in our collective orientation as a team of program directors, mentors and participants, towards the world at large throughout our process of storytelling and theatre making.

Ahmed’s (2015, 2017, 2006) notions of sweaty concepts, feminist homework and the importance of acknowledging orientations in the world, connect with Anne Bogart’s (2001) notion of resistance, which manifests in theatrical projects in the challenges that emerge to force artists to think creatively to achieve their creative visions. Resistance, Bogart asserts, is an important ingredient for inspiring the creative process and enriching the outcome of the creative work. Bogart explains,

Resistance demands thought, provokes curiosity and mindful alertness, and, when overcome and utilized, eventuates in elation. Ultimately the quality of any work is reflected in the size of obstacles encountered. If one's attitude is right, joy, vigour and breakthroughs will be the result of resistance met rather than avoided (p. 141).

Bogart tells stories of using resistances encountered in her creative processes to achieve a practice of freedom¹². Bogart's concept of resistance ties together hooks' (1994) practice of engaged pedagogy as a practice of freedom and Ahmed's sweaty concepts, which articulate that challenges must be overcome for feminist, positive action to take place. The process of overcoming these resistances is what strengthens our convictions and empowers us, as conscientious thinkers in and with the world.

Lateral relationships between students and teachers, inherent within Freire's (2000) critical pedagogy, translate into Artista's theatrical learning and creation space in the form of collective creation, understood as "the practice of collaboratively devising works of performance" (Syssoyeva & Proudfit, 2013, p. 2). The collective creation model that Artista strives towards offers the opportunity to nurture individual senses of identity and collectively, a sense of community. Syssoyeva and Proudfit highlight the organic relationship between theatre and the potential social mandate that can exist within theatre creation environments:

That theatre should lend itself to such an encounter seems a logical outgrowth of the dialectical play between dramas traditional concern with the social and the intrinsically social nature of making and sharing drama (p. 7).

Collective creation is a model that acknowledges various perspectives within a working team and assumes that all perspectives will have a role in the outcome. Collective creation embodies the lateral power dynamics in Freire's problem-posing education and situates this critical pedagogy within a theatre creation and education environment.

hooks (1994) does not offer specific tactics for the implementation of her engaged pedagogy, acknowledging that each learning space, group of students and teacher/facilitator are unique. There is no singular method that will function for all contexts and human dynamics.

¹² Bogart (2001) tells the story of being limited financially and therefore not having access to expensive, conventional theatre spaces her early productions. This forced her to embrace unconventional spaces, which shaped her productions and ultimately led to more creative, thoughtful final products.

Teachers and facilitators must nurture excitement in their learning spaces in conversation with the participants and contexts in their spaces, keeping in mind the engaged pedagogical framework. The phenomenological approach of responding to a learning space with the methods that best suit, reflects hooks' urging that teachers approach their practice by listening to their students and trusting their own intuition (van Manen, 1997).

Additional Literature Review

My investigation was two pronged: I searched for contemporary scholarship exploring theatre programs that emulate Artista's intergenerational, theatre-based, process-focussed model; and I reviewed examples of auto-ethnographies and narrative inquiries, examining how other researchers narrated their lived experience and in cases, placed these narratives in conversation with relevant theories. My search for comparable theatre training programs employed a combination of keywords such as 'mentorship,' 'intergenerational,' 'theatre,' 'drama,' 'personal growth,' 'gender-specific,' 'diversity', 'youth' and 'empowerment.' These revealed a handful of programs which have been documented in scholarly work including Dutton (2001), Hughes & Wilson (2004), Kane (2014), Nelson (2011), and Perry & Rogers (2011). My search for narrative research resulted in a collection of auto-ethnographies curated and edited by Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing* (1996). Memoire and other experiential modes of writing influenced the direction of this research; for example, Lisa M. Tillmann-Healy's account of her experience of her bulimia in "Secret Life in a Culture of Thinness: Reflections on Body, Food, and Bulimia" provided an honest, vulnerable and engaging perspective on her experience, the quality of which I would like to emulate in my own writing.

Dutton (2001) demonstrates how drama can be utilized to nourish competence in group decision making and form a sense of group identity in youth. Perry & Rogers (2011) explore how devising theatre inspires a practice of self-inquiry and growth. Nelson (2011) offers a situated ethnography examining how play making builds communities and instils power and agency in participants. Kane (2014) identifies progressive pedagogical ideologies employed in UCLA's Summer High School Dance Theatre Intensive program that nourish short and long-term experiences, transformation, and growth in participants. Finally, Hughes & Wilson (2004)

reveal the impact of taking part in youth theatre on young people's personal and social development.

The following various ethnographies and case studies provide insight into performance as a tool for personal and collective growth, reveal the shape that various youth theatre training models and structures take, and provide a point of reference from which to proceed with my own inquiry.

Devised theatre is a term often used interchangeably with collective creation, though it technically implies that all artists involved have influence over all aspects of production, whereas collective creation tends towards artists defining specific roles for themselves within the production. Perry & Rogers (2011) use the term "devising theatre" to refer to the collective creation project that was the result of their research in which four young women created theatre inspired by their observations of women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Perry and Rogers begin to fill an absence in the literature on the impact of devising theatre on the expression of student identity and engagement in critique of their surroundings. They draw on Ellsworth's notion of 'transitional spaces'¹³ and asks how devising theatre can inspire a practice of self-inquiry and growth.

This study, part of a federally-funded, multi-site case study called Youth CLAIM (Critical Literacies in Arts Integrated Media), took place in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). Experiences held by research participants in grade-nine drama class served as sites of inquiry. This study focuses in on four young women between the ages of 14 and 16 who wrote and performed *The Clinic Scene*, involving imagined urban feminine identities based in the DTES based on the participants' experiences observing these women. Both process and performance are examined in the research.

Devised performance was the method used to create the *Clinic Scene*. Researchers guided students through workshops in performance creation, non-text-based performance creation strategies, and engaged with concepts of spectatorship. Video and audio recordings, jottings of performance creation work, as well as ethnographic data sources, which included

¹³ Ellsworth's concept of transitional explores the dynamic of relationality, the similarities and differences between the self and a subject of inquiry. In Perry and Rogers (2011), participants examine themselves in relation to the characters they build in their theatrical creation, to identify, similarities and differences and engage in a process of self-representation.

individual and focus group interviews, observations, field notes and student generated artifacts served as data.

The research found that participants engaged with the concept of transitional spaces, as hoped, but were limited by their preconceived notions of performance and what a ‘school play’ should be: that is, a performance of a pre-written script (Perry & Rogers, 2011). Artista’s learning space, like that of Perry and Rogers, is process-oriented, and avoids the use of pre-written texts as performance content and instead uses original content, in their case created in a devised process, and in Artista’s case, a collective process. In both sets of research, the creation method is used as a method for “personal growth.”

Nelson (2011) offers a situated ethnography that gathers reflections from filmed interviews on how play making builds communities, instils power and agency in participants, and deepens participant understanding of power dynamics in their surroundings. Nelson entered the research with the expectation that community acts as a precursor to school success for urban students of colour.¹⁴ Playmaking (a form of Applied Theatre/Drama (AT/D))¹⁵ is examined. Participants created theatrical texts in response to the question, “If you could change one thing about the world to make your life better, what would it be?” (p. 161). The texts were then performed for an audience. The selected participants were 22 students (aged 14 to 20) of mixed backgrounds, of an equal gender breakdown with little drama and performance experience. Research participants were selected based on their positive dispositions.¹⁶

Data included filmed interviews of participant experiences of learning objectives, community building, and perspectives on collective actions. Nelson reveals that this procedure of playmaking and performance offered participants an increased sense of power and agency, a greater understanding of participants’ social and cultural positions within the distribution of economic and social power in their social spheres and the belief in one’s power as a necessary starting point for action. Whereas playmaking is different from collective creation in that its

¹⁴ Nelson (2011) cites Macedo and Bartolomé (1999); Nieto (1999); and Ladson-Billings (2005) as theorists on culturally relevant teaching who agree on “the importance of the establishment of community as a necessary factor for facilitating school success for urban students of colour (p. 158).

¹⁵ Applied Drama and Theater (AD/T) is a process of theatre creation (writing, producing and performing plays), that teams drama instructors and community members together to address the local conditions and perspectives that surround them (Nelson, 2011, p. 1)

¹⁶ Though the group lacked experience in theatre, Nelson (2011) states that “the positive energy, creativity, and thoughtfulness of the group suggested that they would have a wealth of ideas for the playmaking piece” (p. 160).

intended outcome is a fully produced play, which generally follows the structure of a singular, cohesive narrative, this study is useful for offering insight into the impact of writing, producing and performing a play on racialized students. Nelson's research implements Freire's (2000) notion of problem posing education within an AT/D context, and promotes the use of arts practices as tools for dismantling inequitable power structures at the social and institutional levels.

Shortcomings of this study include that the omission of the author's positionality, which prevents an understanding of their influence in designing and guiding the workshops. The study focuses on positive outcomes avoiding a discussion of challenges that might have resulted in participants experiences of the process. For example, Nelson explains that two male participants did not complete the term and their perspectives are not included in the research. Finally, the post-performance filmed interviews were voluntary, which I expect might self-select participants who had positive or negative experiences and be an unwelcoming platform for participants who were ambivalent or who were shy to share negative impressions of the process.

I appreciate that Nelson explores the experience of playmaking and performance with a group of urban youth of colour, since my research also intends to lead a culturally and ethnically diverse group of young women through the process of theatre training and performance creation. Additionally, this research process examines power dynamics in the lives of research participants, which ties into Freire's (2000) critical pedagogy which inspired my theoretical framework and shapes my definition of empowerment.¹⁷

Kane (2014) and Hughes & Wilson (2004) offer a theoretical lens on participant empowerment through theatre training through theory-focussed case study methodology, and a triangulated approach intersecting ethnographic research, survey research and narrative research respectively.

Kane (2014) is a theory-focussed case study which asks, what progressive pedagogical ideologies are employed in UCLA's Summer High School Dance Theatre Intensive program to create short and long-term experiences of transformation and growth in participants? The Hughes & Wilson (2004) inquiry is guided by three goals; 1) to identify models of effective practice in youth theatre, 2) to generate and analyze evidence of the importance of youth theatre

¹⁷ The practice of identifying and overcoming personal resistances to engage in the continuous process of becoming a conscious being.

on young people's development, and 3) to explore the theoretical constructs used by those participating and working within youth theatre, to develop a more solid theory about why youth theatre is an effective tool for personal growth.

Kane (2014) explores how the program's diverse intergenerational spaces employ mentorship, collaborative creation, dance and theatre training to facilitate participant transitions from adolescence to adulthood. Kane regards the UCLA model as one that provides participants with short and long-term transformative potential, highlighting the power of diverse, intergenerational spaces to nurture transformation in participants. This program offers participants within the age of transition between adolescence and adulthood support from teachers and college-age mentors, who approach the participants as holistic works-in-progress.

As Kane's analysis was text-based analysis, participant experiences do not feature as testaments to the effectiveness of the program's pedagogy, which would provide a more nuanced, less uniquely celebratory lens of the program.

Hughes & Wilson (2004) intend to remedy the scarcity of publicly available literature on the topic of youth theatre. Hughes & Wilson offer a quantitative and qualitative study that employs a mixed-methodology approach triangulating ethnographic research, survey research and narrative research. Hughes & Wilson employ role theory¹⁸ and the concept of liminal spaces¹⁹ as a theoretical framework to generalize their findings that youth theatre provides a space for self-exploration and can be an important protective factor for young people experiencing social exclusion and high-risk environments.

Hughes and Wilson engaged 250 youth theatre participants, aged 12 to 30, in creative research workshops, gathering their impressions on their experiences participating in youth theatre through a questionnaire completed by a total of 359 participants and 73 individuals employed by youth theatre workers. Additionally, they requested qualitative interviews from 23 youth theatre participants and 26 youth theatre workers. They also explored archives from computer databases.

¹⁸ Role theory views everyday activities as the acting out of socially defined roles, which dictate the duties, expectations, behaviours, and rights a person must contend with (Hughes & Wilson, 2004).

¹⁹ "Liminal space or liminoid activities provide a place and 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" (Hughes & Wilson, 2003, p. 69).

Hughes and Wilson found that youth theatre provides an opportunity for self-exploration, which contributed to research participant's personal and social development. In this regard they found that youth theatre is an important protective factor for young people experiencing social exclusion or growing up in a high-risk environment offering improvement in confidence, performance skills, ease in making friends, sense of open mindedness, the ability to understand and work with others, the ability to express oneself, and happiness.

Shortcomings of this study include that reflections were not gathered from participants who did not continue in their youth theatre programs. Additionally, Hughes and Wilson do not acknowledge the specific training context each participant came from, which diminishes the importance of context and complex human dynamics in shaping the research participant's lived experiences.

Hughes and Wilson identified that youth theatre provides young people with opportunities to assert their independence, take risks, and take on responsibility. While their research involved gathering a large pool of data through surveys and data archives, I situate my research in memories of my lived experiences within a singular learning environment, Artista, to explore my lived experience within the specific, nuanced, complex context of the ever evolving Artista program. These experiences moulded the program over time to how it stands today.

Together, Ellis and Bochner (1996), Perry and Rogers (2011), Nelson (2011), Kane (2014) and Hughes and Wilson (2004) help me to specify the methodology and methods of my own research. A narrative inquiry integrating phenomenological methods to reflect on personal experiences and other phenomena experienced within the Artista session, will become useful to situate myself within the particular context and the interplay of human uniqueness therein (van Manen, 1997).

This research indicates that collective processes are a significant tool for participant empowerment and transformation. These various sources give me confidence that Artista's feminist, critical pedagogy is a site worthy of inquiry and that the collective learning environment Artista offers is a fertile space for participants to grow, trust one another, collaborate with one another, better understand their communities and the roles they play within them.

Artista is an evolving program, growing and changing with the experiences of myself, the other Artista team members and participants of each session. As long as I am program director, I will push to provide a more effective environment for participant empowerment and community building. As such, I believe that interrogating my perspective, the ‘I’ involved in the process, will offer me greater insight into my own artistic pedagogy and will offer Artista an opportunity for further intentional growth.

Procedures: Data Collection and Analysis

My narrative from my experiences at Imago Theatre and as program director of Artista, written in the style of memory fragments (Palucci, 2000) inspired by lifeworld sensitive texts (van Manen, 1996) will serve as data in my research. My approach to writing involved “free writing,” a style of unfiltered, automatic writing on a broad selection of memories of the creation and growth of the Artista program. I worked initially to write down any memory that felt relevant to the narrative of Artista’s growth. I then rewrote and distilled these stories to be as precise as possible to best encapsulate the experiences I had and to get as close to my recollection of the experience as possible without simplifying or cheapening the phenomena.

Finally, after spending time enriching and specifying each of these stories, I became selective to only include essential moments of understanding and of personal resistance that shaped Artista. Selecting memory fragments presented the greatest challenge of the narrative writing process, as the stories paint me both in a positive and negative light. I strove to mitigate the insecurity of sharing these unflattering memories by recalling my feminist, engaged theoretical framework. In sharing embarrassing, difficult moments, I engage in a process of self-actualization through storytelling; the process of unpacking these stories allows for personal reflection and growth towards better tactics in the future. I am strengthened by remembering that the act of leaning into this resistance leads to a richer creative outcome, which I hope will be evident in my research (Bogart, 2001). Additionally, these stories of less exemplary behavior are my responsibility to share; I ask Artista participants to be vulnerable and share their stories of doubt, fear and insecurity, and so too must I share mine (hooks, 1994).

Once the pool of stories was selected, I placed them in a dialogic relationship with hooks (1994), Freire (2000), Ahmed (2006, 2015, 2017), Bogart (2001), and Syssoyeva and Proudfit

(2013), to investigate my research question: How can feminist practice and theory as laid out through narrative inquiry shape artistic pedagogy

The following memory fragments are my recollections of significant learning throughout the process of creating Artista, building a pedagogy for the program, and committing to creating and performing theatre as a practitioner. My memory fragments take the form of short stories and anecdotes, which I've titled "scenes." I reference this performance convention because while these memory fragments are inspired by real events, they arrive into this text transformed through my own subjectivity, by time, clouded by emotions, and submerged in self-judgement. Rather than constituting any objective truth, these "scenes" do however track my own feelings and perceptions as a participant benefiting from a mentorship program.

Time provides a barrier to recalling the past, especially with moments long gone. In Chapter Two, I recall experiences from Artista's very first annual session five years ago, when I began working with young women while feeling like I had little professional experience to offer them. I remember these moments emotionally, through my own eyes and body, a body which has often felt diminished by judgements from myself and others for being too fat, too flat chested, too large in the thighs, too short, too white to be Latin American, too professionally inexperienced, and various other inner-voices that undermined my capacity to mentor and direct a program such as Artista. Such inner-voices I take to be endemic of systemic power inequity, and here my experience may mirror those of younger participants in the program.

I imagine myself as an audience member gazing towards a performance of my memories, aware that, as with all other art I consume, based on my current values, artistic practices and worldviews, I project meaning onto what I remember. I orient myself towards the stage of my past and practice extending my reach towards the objects of my memories, reaching towards my own personal storytelling, aware that it is impossible to grasp any original, authentic experience.

In Chapter Two, I attempt to focus my research lens on my own lived experience of events as much as possible, though I reference individuals where necessary, whose names I have changed to protect their privacy. These "scenes" are unified by the question, "How could I have been a better mentor, pedagogue, and program director in this particular moment?" And they share a strong sense of how I learned from encounters with resistance. They are evidence of my

path towards empowerment through my involvement with Artista, which speaks to the potential of theatre mentorship programs.

CHAPTER TWO: Scenes from a Developing Pedagogy

These scenes are reconstructions of moments where I believe I faced challenges in my pedagogy and program direction within the context of Artista; and within my practice as a theatre performer and creator working in Montreal. Recalling and recreating these scenes through writing allows me to externalize and analyze these moments in ways that make my teaching instincts visible and available for questioning. The scenes are not presented in chronological order, but instead are woven together to shape a narrative of personal growth and empowerment. In Chapter Three, I analyse these moments further in conversation with feminist pedagogy as a way to articulate the pillars of a developing pedagogy.

Get the Job

I receive an email from a former teacher inviting students to apply for an Administrative Assistant position at Imago Theatre, a theatre company with a woman focussed mandate. When I tell my family about my interview (we are all together celebrating my sister's wedding), my brother reminds me to align my interest with the company's interests, and my father's eyes are hopeful. I know he fears that his youngest daughter, the only one in the family in pursuit of an artistic dream, will never find stability in her field. I feel hopeful too.

The interview is two days later with one of the company's directors. I highlight my experience teaching theatre to young women, a part-time gig I held during my last year of undergraduate studies. I explain my interest in teaching theatre to young women and how magical, for lack of a better word, I found this gender-specific space to be. I ask good questions. The director seems curious, compassionate, and wicked smart. The interview ends, and I am ecstatic. My fingers hurt from crossing them so tightly. A few days later, I receive a life changing email, inviting me to join the Imago Theatre team.

I am currently working morning shifts at a bakery where my employers are verbally abusive to one another. For many reasons, not the least of which is the prospect of working in my field for the first time ever, I am ecstatic to be able to give them my two weeks notice.

The Fan Club

From the get-go, the community of theatre professionals at the heart of Imago introduce me to the Montreal theatre scene: its artistic directors, stage managers, producers, general managers, actors and more. Imago produces beautiful plays about hard subjects that stir my emotions. I dream of the opportunity to act in one of its productions one day. “You will,” I’m told, and suddenly I feel seen, recognized even.

With new colleagues from Imago, I see theatre. A lot of theatre. I hear what they think and have a chance to articulate my thoughts on storytelling choices. My opinions are welcomed. The director influences me with her aesthetic sensibility, and what she feels is necessary to have in a piece of theatre. She patiently answers my questions and repeats her answers when I forget. I have tried to absorb her amazing ability to interact with people in a direct and honest way.

The cast of characters makes me laugh. Here, expressivity rules--but it’s not always what you think. One crosses her eyes when asked how she is, another shouts “shit la mard” when late for a meeting. And when describing something special in the theatre? “It has a certain...comment ça va.” It’s a special world, and I think I might belong.

The Meta Narrative

Imago's administrative needs connect me to theatre makers in Montreal in ways that, before starting my work here, seemed unattainable. At Imago I observe, listen, analyze and pick apart theatre in a supportive, ambitious environment amongst more experienced theatre makers.

I overstay my time as artistic administrator, like a baby in the womb who sees no reason to squeeze out just yet. It is warm and safe in here, and I'm afraid of the sting of the cold air.

Slowly Approaching a Wall

There are long stretches when I am alone in the office. I teach myself to use photoshop to create graphic images, research rehearsal halls, and liaise with actors in Imago's productions to collect information for producing program notes. During the long days of sending mundane emails, I bolster myself with the thought that I am learning a lot and now, at least the theatre community knows my name.

Some days in my solitude, I feel useless. I come home after work and reveal to my partner that I have little to share; the day inched by and my eyes are red from scrolling facebook. My back hurts. I have developed a varicose vein in my knee that is sore. My jeans are squeezing my belly in a way they didn't used to. I hate the feeling of being disconnected from my body. I'm trying to figure out where my strengths lie in this business.

The director says things like, "You won't be around forever," and references the day when someone else takes over as Administrative Associate. These statements make me anxious.

The Genesis of Artista

I was in the middle of writing an email. The director walked by and announced that she wants to create a free theatre mentorship program for young women under Imago's umbrella. Given my interest in teaching theatre, would I like to create it? Yes, I stutter. Does she really mean it?

Meeting Beth

Imago's leadership broaches the topic of someone joining me in co-coordinating Artista, our name for the new program. As a team gathers around the conference table for our preliminary meeting, I pretend that I'm mature, and I know what I'm doing. I am uneasy about working with someone with vastly more experience than I have, but right now, excitement overwhelms the fear.

Beth bounces her knees as she listens, and I'm distracted by the sound of her foot tapping. My voice cracks as I try to explain the concept behind the mentorship program to her, how it is inspired by the AMY Project²⁰ in Toronto, how it too will be free and focussed on participant empowerment. Beth is in her early 40s, a recent immigrant with a vast body of knowledge who has been practising theatre and performance since her early teens. I notice she has the most exquisite accent, but only later will I recognize the exoticizing impulse behind that observation.

At the conference table, I sense the difference amongst team members in terms of experience and confidence. But for now we are listening are listening to each other as equals.

²⁰ The AMY Project is a Toronto-based non-profit organizations based on the structure of professional artists mentoring youth in the performing arts. Its mandate reads, "The AMY Project builds the leadership, confidence, and unique voice of young women and non-binary youth in Toronto and surrounding regions by providing them with performance training, connections to artistic mentors, experience working in a professional theatre, and support towards the early growth of their careers" (What is AMY?).

The Beginning

A blue plastic tablecloth is spread on the floor of the exposition room at the cultural centre, a community building that will be Artista's new home. It's a bright space where local artists and participants of the centre's workshops display their art creations. Beth's eyes dash towards the entrance where at any moment, a young woman will walk in and Artista will begin. We stand in a room brightly lit by big windows and wait. I feel too nervous to speak.

A girl and her mother approach the door. My colleague Beth whispers to me as she grabs my hand, "We have to do this together." We meet Jackie, the youngest member this year's cohort, who is only 15. Technically the cut off for Artista is 16 but with only 8 applicants, we accepted everyone who applied. Beth and I hold hands as we meet her and the other 7 participants, welcoming them to take a seat on the floor around the table cloth.

I'll will never forget the feeling of Beth's hand in mine, that feeling of solidarity between us as we walked towards the door to meet our girls.

The Metro Scene

Beth and I enter the metro on our way to the centre for another weekly Artista session. We chat about the participants, the program, life, and Beth's plans to one day return home and begin theatre projects in her community. We discuss our shared confusion about about being from many countries at once. I, for example, hold Venezuelan and Canadian passports, with Colombian and Mexican familial roots. "Prochaine station, metro Frontenac," the robotic metro voice announces and it jars us to the

realization that amidst all of our pleasant chatter, we've managed to go three stops in the wrong direction. We laugh at ourselves and exit the cart to head in the other direction, giggling "I was following you!" "Well I was following you!" We laugh, but I remember this is the second time we've taken the metro in the wrong direction together. Friendship is a pleasure, to be sure, but could assumptions of this kind get in the way of leadership? Who's watching the store?

Jane

Jane, one of Artista's first cohort members, has just dropped the bomb that she was sexually assaulted when she was younger. The room is silent. Her eyes dart around, reflecting her anxiety, more intense now than I've ever seen it before. I can tell that she doesn't want to dwell on it, and I don't know what to say anyway. Beth thanks her for sharing, and we offer to stick around after the workshop if she wants to continue talking. There seems to be a stiffness amongst the group now that I don't know how to break. I feel like everyone is waiting me to say something.

Months will pass before I realize that this moment wasn't about me.

On the Topic of Being Ready

Ready. What a silly word. When it comes to all things important and challenging in my life, I've never been ready to start.

A couple of years ago, I was talking with a friend about making meaningful theatre. She said that I should create a show about the Venezuelan crisis, which has been building slowly ever since I was a child in Caracas. Like so much knowledge, it slipped slowly into focus: more kids on the street

begging for food, the price of lunch at school creeping upwards, the increased frequency of protests, and the wider spread of “barrios” (favelas, slums) on the mountains surrounding my city. Make a show about Venezuela? I thought, “No, I have to be braver, know more, and feel more confident about my cultural identity.” Because whatever theatre I create on the topic of Venezuela will have to be perfect. I told her that I will do it when I’m ready.

Fear. Fear of failing, fear of losing control, fear being judged, fear of misrepresenting. Fear gets in the way.²¹

The 2016 Outcome

“Do you need help? If not, I’ll head out to get a sandwich,” Beth inquires in her smooth, easy way. “No I’m fine,” I smile, feigning that I’m in control, while I rapidly place chairs facing the stage, making a mental list of all the things I have still left to do before the show starts. “Alright then, I’ll see you in a bit!” Her cheery ways bother me tonight, and I wonder how she cannot see I’m falling apart.

It’s now 15 minutes to the start of the 2016 outcome performance. I hear voices on the other side of the performance hall door. An important donor has arrived. I can’t open the doors yet to let her in because, 1. the headshot board is not finished, 2. the donation box is not prepared, 3. the participants are not in position backstage, and 4. I haven’t put on my makeup, my armour in this fully fledged battle of the world vs. me. I’m behind schedule, and now I’m stressed and embarrassed. I struggle to stay level headed, there is too much to do, I feel caught, alone.

²¹ This scene is adapted from a text I wrote for Imago Theatre’s blog entitled *Ready or Not: Reflections from one of the creators of Elsewhere* (<http://www.imagotheatre.ca/ready-or-not-reflections-from-one-of-the-creators-of-elsewhere/>).

The performance begins, and I remark how nice the signs I made, which constitute the set for our show, look on the back wall: “She said, I feel alone.” “She said, Fuck you!” “She said, you are the best thing that ever happened to me.” Statements from women in our participants lives. At least all of the time I spent creating the signs was not all for naught, I muse to myself. As I watch the performance, I imagine that if I could add a sign to that wall right now it would read, “She said, why didn’t you help me?” I feel alone.

I try to focus on the performance. Leila reads her lines off of her hand and Monica struggles to follow the blocking, but considering how little time they had to rehearse, the girls are doing great. During the talk back discussion afterwards, Monica, who is indigenous and about to graduate out of foster care, says Artista gave her a sense of community that she didn’t have elsewhere. In my fragile state, this bring tears to my eyes. Disorganized, yes. But, more importantly, Artista seems to be fulfilling its mandate support young women in need.

My parents are in the audience tonight, still integrating into life in Montreal since leaving Venezuela last year. I am happy to have them close, there is no pressure to perform or to speak.

I Broke It

Two days have passed, and I decide to broach the topic of last Friday’s outcome performance with Imago leadership. A major critique was that the presentation was not ready, too messy and too short. “It’s insulting to the audience.”

The air leaves my chest. My mind is racing: “I tried! I worked my ass off! Beth didn’t help me! You didn’t help me! Nobody helped me! I was alone! It’s too much work! What else am I supposed to do?” Instead, I remain silent. For the next couple of weeks, I tiptoe around the office. I hate that I let people down and fear that my work relationships, once so playful, might be broken.

The Aftermath

What if broken is just another word for no method? One week later, the team sits around the conference table at the Monday morning meeting, the first collective jam session since the 2016 Artista outcome. Everyone in the administrative team shares their reflections about what happened and how the process worked. Many things are said, what worked, what didn’t. I am learning so much in hearing these perspectives. But the constructive criticism that is ringing out most loudly is this: it is not a sign of weakness to ask for help.

Casting, Staging, Directing

Wise women plan it out. This time around, we started by bringing together the whole team to assign roles and lay the groundwork for Artista 2017. The dream was that leadership should manifest in a collective way. If everyone on the team feels responsible towards Artista, they will give their hearts fully to it and then I will feel good asking them for help because this baby is almost as much theirs as it is mine, right?

We gather at the conference table, looking for a new approach: directors, actors, theatre creators, old faces and new, all invested in theatre mentorship for women. We map out roles and assign clear tasks. We

discuss lateralizing our team dynamics and giving greater voice to the mentors in planning the session. It's a fresh start.

Instead of Artista determining the theme and weekly workshops from the top down, as was the case during previous sessions with Beth, mentors will be involved in the decision making and participants will have greater say in how the decisions manifest. Each mentor will have the opportunity to lead two workshops in a performance craft of their choosing. We will increase their honorarium so that they can more comfortably devote time to the program and so that the team can meet every two weeks to reflect on how the process is working. I learn that creating a collective expectation and a platform to communicate is everything.

Home and Belonging

I look over to Sofia, the new Associate Program Director, who is my age and comes to the table with a background in theatre design. She is Mexican and many of our meetings so far have taken place in Spanish. I've been quite distanced from the Latin American community since I moved to Montreal in 2006, and speaking Spanish feels delightful on my tongue.

Ideas of how to plan and what to include in this next session immediately start flowing. Sofia, who is a theatre designer and mask maker, will lead mask-making workshops, which are interesting to me as well as I am considering using mask as a performance medium in the play I'm creating about the crisis in Venezuela. For the session's theme, I offer 'Home and Belonging;' in part a response to being a Venezuelan in Canada, watching Venezuelans escape the crisis to the exterior en masse; and in part an embrace of the stories of my colleagues, also migrants. This is where our own histories and our own artistic practices inspire the pedagogy and work of Artista. We investigate personal stories to build stage narratives, and

discuss how to represent lived experience onstage. How participants decide to run with these ideas remains to be seen.

Making Time and Space

Once the Artista session starts, it all happens so fast. One choice we make as a collective for 2017 involves structuring time into workshops to create meaningful bonds between participants and their mentors, something that had been left to chance and informality during earlier sessions.

In another planning meeting, I notice that Mary and Sofia, two members of the Artista team, are characteristically quiet and I wonder how I can facilitate hearing their voices. In the coming months, I make sure to ask specifically for their input during meetings and leave ample space for them to speak. Also, I find ways to have private or informal check-ins with them individually to exchange ideas. Communication, I see now, means pulling moments out of the everyday hubbub.

Pull Up Your Bootstraps, Soldier!

I hear myself telling myself I'm not beautiful, talented, rigorous, or trained enough to become a professional performer and that I shouldn't even try. I am going to fail regardless. To those voices I retort: I'm actually in a perfect position to take on the challenge of becoming a professional artist because, 1. I am infinitely passionate about my craft, 2. I'm healthy, 3. I'm educated, and 4. I have the invaluable support of my partner, my parents and a great community of artists. Thinking about these intersections of privilege in conjunction with my debilitating fear of pursuing performance as a career, I've arrived at the following conclusion: given everything I have, if I don't pursue my passion to become a performer, I'm a fraud. I really don't want to be a fraud.

Jackie

Jackie and I sit on the stairs of the cultural centre. The workshop just ended and one of Jackie's guardians, either her lawyer father, her lawyer mother, or one of their lawyer spouses, is coming to pick her up but they are late. I don't want her waiting alone so I hang out and make conversation. "How are things going?" She launches into talking about how her parents are very unsupportive of her pursuing acting. Her voice remains calm and grounded, her eyes unwavering. She is brave and smart, which I would never have known from her application to Artista, which if I recall correctly consisted of: "My name is Jackie. I'm 15 and I want to be part of Artista." Her application was so sparse and underprepared that if we had had more applicants, her application would have been overlooked, which is a pity considering that she is really benefiting from the support the program offers. Now that I know Jackie, I can't imagine her not being a part of the program--I see for the first time how the application process can delimit our participants in unhelpful ways.

Why am I here?

Jane, a returning mentee from an earlier year, is script coordinator. She has to collect creative content from the participants so that she can piece it together into a script for the outcome presentation. Most of the participants have not shared their content with us, and we've been requesting it for three weeks so that we can collectively produce the script. We are in the midst of enjoying dinner when Jane comes down hard on the group for the delay and rattles on in a stern tone. The participants meet each other's gaze, exchanging a wink and a smile.

I'll soon be comforting Jane through a panic attack in the hallway. She knows she acted out; her lecture was a little nutty and a bit of an overreaction to the participants' crime of tardy submissions. Her anxiety

makes me anxious. Is Jane's panic going to tarnish the participants experience in the program? Am I sufficiently equipped to support Jane through these moments of anxiety? How do we get the script written without the participants' work? Despite my instinct that the job of script coordinator is hard, and this person might need more clarity and support from me to sort out how to do the job, I just tell her that everything is going to be ok. Soothing, ok, but how does it really help her do better in the role?

Jane's anxiety is an unexpected repercussion of not offering her sufficient clarity in her job description. The thing is, how can I know what the job description is when the job has never been done before? I make a note to bring this question to the team during the next planning session.

Taking Sides

There are 22 of us participants, mentors, program directors, and our dinner guest, a young theatre creator and performer of colour, sitting around the dinner table. Silence rings out in the room. The way I see it, Rebecca, a mentor, and the young artist, were both making valid points during tonight's conversation, each coming at the topic of representation on stage from their differing perspectives and lived experiences. Rebecca is a white actor who has falls between the casting cracks (too old, too young, too ethnic looking, etc.), and the young artist is a biracial (white and black) who has every right to be angry about the underrepresentation of black bodies in media and the arts.

I'm ashamed that I made an effort to touch base with with the young artist after dinner, acknowledging her side of the argument to stay 'cool' (she's very edgy and very cool), while not making the same effort with Rebecca who, I justify, didn't need my support.

Where does this instinct to be ‘cool’ come from? This isn’t high school after all. Further evidence to the fact that I am too young and inexperienced to be program director of Artista. Grow up, Joy.

The feeling of shame resulting from choosing sides is immediate and lingers with me to this day reminding me to listen, to not let wanting to be ‘cool’ overshadow my integrity, and pull me away from supporting my teammates.

Why am I here? *Part 2*

The 15 young women who compose the 2017 Artista ensemble stand beneath the bright lights of the performance space at the cultural centre. They have just finished their performance of original work and are glowing with pride, taking in the audience’s heartfelt applause. They take their bow, and May, a bright young poet, calls the Artista team to the stage to thank us all, with flowers, for our work. May calls Tara, who took over after Jane as Script Coordinator, to the stage, but Tara is not in the audience. She has been absent from our meetings for several weeks and has not answered my emails, text messages or calls.

I saw her yesterday by fluke that at the print shop. She would have walked right by me if I hadn’t called out her name. The words out of her mouth when she saw me were a ramble, “I’m sorry I haven’t been in touch my grandmother passed away and I’ve been stressed and not sleeping and all over the place.” I responded with something along the lines of, “No worries. It would be great to see you at the outcome tomorrow.”

I took her apology and didn’t offer her one in return, though I owe it to her. For not giving her a clear sense of function and responsibility in the

program, for causing her to feel confused, and for asking her to create work that we could not use. I've written her several times since, asking to meet to find closure but she doesn't write back. I still have the card that the participants wrote for her ready for her when she is ready for me.

Tara's decision to distance herself from the program after her enthusiastic request to be included in the program's functioning in some capacity, reminds me to make sure that if I'm welcoming someone onto the Artista team, it's because there is a job to accomplish. There have been and there will continue to be many people who love Artista's mandate and who want to get involved, which is so wonderful. But I must always make sure that their time will be clearly guided towards a purpose.

Ready

In 2013 the Venezuelan crisis exploded (imagine – starvation, skyrocketing inflation, record homicide rates, guns everywhere, fear, hate...). I am overwhelmed by the news and in response have asked a good friend and theatre director to help me create and direct a one-person show about this damn crisis. I guess I'm ready.

I'm diving into the heart of what I'm most afraid of: I am making myself vulnerable to being told that I am not Venezuelan enough and that Venezuela doesn't want or need me. Or is it that *I* never wanted its politics, its poverty, its guns, its protests? Do I have a right to tell the story of this crisis? Will other Venezuelans think I am a fraud?

I will create this piece of theatre for the beautiful country that raised me and my parents, which welcomed my grandparents, for my family still rooted

there, and to help me understand and own my identity as a Venezuelan-Canadian who simply can't let go.²²

²² This scene is adapted from a text I wrote for Imago Theatre's blog entitled Ready or Not: Reflections from one of the creators of Elsewhere (<http://www.imagotheatre.ca/ready-or-not-reflections-from-one-of-the-creators-of-elsewhere/>).

CHAPTER THREE: A Developing Pedagogy

Reflection

Reading through my narrative in Chapter Two, I'm overwhelmed by a question: where would I be now if I hadn't been hired at Imago Theatre in 2013? I can't imagine my life without Micheline's mentorship, without the community of artists I have come to know during my five years working there, without the theatre projects I initiated with other Imago Theatre team members, and without Artista, which has provided me with such rich artistic, pedagogical and personal experiences, and which has to date touched the lives of 43 young women. These past five years have been ones of intense personal growth, resulting largely from being given the responsibility and challenge of creating and directing a mentorship program at the green age of 24, and subsequently facing the various emotional and professional challenges involved therein. The resistances I have come up against in my time with Imago Theatre and Artista have empowered me and shaped my feminist pedagogical practice.

My narrative reflects how the 2017 Artista session was significantly enriched by various decisions, a significant one being the implementation of lateral team working dynamics amongst program directors and mentors, centralizing the mentor's voices in planning the sessions and teaching workshops. The resulting growth in the program validates the old adage, "Two heads are better than one," or in this case, five heads are better than one. My feeling of loneliness expressed in my memory fragments of the 2016 outcome performance, diminished when I understood that I didn't have to work alone and could call on the support of my team. Miche's idea to meet every two weeks to reflect on past sessions and look towards the future allowed a team to materialize. The mentors evolved in my perspective from individuals I had to schedule into the program, to colleagues I could confide in and rely on.

Artista's current pedagogical model has come about in response to various challenging experiences, including those articulated in Chapter Two. These include developing protocols of listening and repertoires of response to participant histories of trauma; finding ways to support stronger, richer relationships between participants and their mentors; nurturing our responsibility to an audience, through an hour-long outcome presentation (requiring greater creation structure and care in shaping participant's original stories into performances); committing to my own theatre creation and performance projects to gain confidence as an artist;

threading my own artistic interests practices into Artista's pedagogy; and building a strong community, with some overlap, from year to year .

Artista shifted the curricular focus away from professional theatre training towards storytelling and ensemble building exercises; the program implemented lateral team dynamics and asking a greater commitment of our team members, assigning groups of participants to each mentor, and offering these groups time to exchange ideas and dialogue during workshop hours. It is important to also consider the influence of Artista's budget on the program's capacity. With each passing year, Artista has garnered greater financial support from private foundations. The support from the Fondation du Grand Montreal, the RBC Foundation, the Evenko Foundation, Telus, continued partnership with our host, the Georges-Vanier Cultural Centre, and personal donation campaigns, have allowed us to increase Artista's budget from \$10,000 to \$22,000, which has facilitated the Artista mentors increased time investment in the program.

Though Artista's growth has been significant, the program still faces limitations as do I in my role of program director. On a macro level, time is a significant limiting factor. The 76 hours that we spend together over 15 weeks offers enough time to get to know and trust one another, share personal stories, fears and self-doubts, experiment with theatrical techniques, and begin the process of shaping these stories into performance. Participants consistently express a wish for more time to polish their performances before the public performance. Artista, like many other artistic creation processes, will always have to contend with the ticking clock and negotiate individual and collective needs to maximize time use. Additionally, Artista's participants span the ages of 16 to 21, which means that they enter Artista with vastly different levels of theatre training and varying comfort levels expressing themselves through their bodies and voices. I observe that Artista training tends to offer a greater challenge to younger or less experienced participants, while the older or more experienced participants maneuver through the exercises with greater ease as they've often already trained in theatre elsewhere. I would like to see Artista's curriculum challenge all participants, as the process of engaging with and overcoming these resistances I believe leads to empowerment.

One of the greatest limitations I face personally as program director is my feeling of inadequacy offering mentorship to young women while I myself am a young performer with a small amount of professional performance experience. This feeling of inadequacy has been improved in the past year since dedicating myself more fully to my performance career by

embarking on the project of creating my one-woman show about the crisis in Venezuela. This has offered me a greater sense of confidence in my work within the walls of the program. That said, the journey of not feeling like an imposter is one which can only be improved over time as I further amass professional experience and skill.

Analysis

Since Artista's inception in 2014, the program has become more effective in offering participants a "constructive, positive, creative, alternative" (Ahmed, 2015, p. 7), an example of feminist action specifically designed by and for Montreal's theatre-inclined women. This process of evolution of Artista's pedagogical model has been shaped over the course of four years by listening attentively to my lived experiences in the program (van Manen, 1997). Of particular importance have been my moments of facing resistance and interrogating the experiences of these pedagogical and structural approaches, adapting the program to inch closer to a truly feminist, engaged, critical, collective and creative learning space.

The process of interrogating lived experience and the resulting growth is essential to avoid replicating the wider systems of dominance and oppression that exist outside of Artista's learning environment. Paulo Freire (2000) reflects this concern in his articulation of the banking system of education, which views students as empty receptacles awaiting knowledge from teachers, the depositors of this knowledge. Ahmed (2015) reflects a similar concern that systems of dominance insidiously replicate themselves, "Sexism seems to operate as a well-oiled machine that runs all the more smoothly and efficiently for being in constant use" (p. 5). I posit that Artista's programming throws a wrench into this "well-oiled machine" by offering young, female minds an opportunity to orient themselves towards their worlds, question them together, and make visible the matrices of power and inequity that exist within them. Artista's offers participants an opportunity to tell stories of their experiences living in their gendered and often racialized bodies, and then share these stories, these new feminist texts, with an audience through Artista's public platform. As Freire (2000) furthers, the banking system of education is a hierarchical education system that mimics oppressive power dynamics in society at large. In contrast, Artista's feminist, critical learning space is one where mentors, program directors and participants embody Freire's notion of critical co-investigators of their worlds given that the

interests and questions of participants and mentors alike have the potential to shape the Artista session.

Ahmed (2017) contends that feminism is a collective movement involving “bringing people into the room” (p. 17), which harkens to hooks’ (1994) celebration of learning as a collective effort, rather than a hierarchical practice imposed vertically by the teacher/facilitator onto learners. The current Artista pedagogical model, manifesting in the following core components of my teaching philosophy, has been collaboratively created by various artists involved in Artista and Imago over the course of four years, with each artist leaving their fingerprint on the program in the form of valuable insights and reflections of their experiences. I offer gratitude and credit to the following artists for supporting Artista’s growth and my empowerment as an artist and teacher: co-creator Micheline Chevrier, former co-coordinator, Warona Setshwaelo, former associate program director Lorena Trigos, and former mentors Deena Aziz, Stefanie Buxton, and Julie Tamiko Manning.

Components of My Teaching Philosophy

Artista’s pedagogical model can be broken down into the following practical strategies: storytelling and collective creation, which offer the outcomes of empowerment and self-actualization. I will discuss each component in conversation with certain relevant scenes, as well as in dialogue with the engaged, critical, feminist pedagogical theory. While I reference particular scenes in my analysis, I intend for the scenes to collectively stand as a singular narrative of Artista’s growth over the past four years.

Resistance / Empowerment

Ahmed (2017) expresses the need for feminism and feminist theory as practices of world making. She argues that feminist habits must become a practice “despite or even because of what we come up against” (p. 24). This feminist muscle must be relentless and transgressive, which lays the foundation for Ahmed’s “sweaty concepts” (p. 43), which are “generated by practical experience of coming up against a world, or the practical experience of trying to transform a world” (p. 44). Sweaty concepts manifest themselves in physical, theoretical and

philosophical ways, and are in basic form, challenges that must be overcome in order to exist more comfortably in the world. hooks (1994) offers her own version of this:

I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom (p. 12). In Chapter Two, I identify personal boundaries that I faced and which I am learning to overcome. This process of storytelling and analysis is one which I consider to be an essential step in enacting education that is the practice of freedom for the participants in Artista.

Each one of the stories shared in Chapter Two offers an example of coming up against resistance. In working through these challenges and adapting my pedagogical approach and Artista’s pedagogical model, we are exercising our feminist muscles and inching further towards the creation of an feminist creation space. The calibre of these obstacles, as articulated by Bogart (2001), “determines the quality of expression,” which in this case is the Artista program as it stands right now and my pedagogy within it. This learning has led me to this year articulate bravery as a central tenet to the Artista program, which is directly inspired by empowerment as a way of overcoming personal resistances. For the fourth annual Artista session, I have prepared the following definition of Bravery, which is specific to the Artista learning and creation space, and intended to be a tool to face, lean into and overcome personal resistances.

In a brave space we, dare to speak, knowing that others might disagree; have the courage to listen and change our minds; venture to take the lead; make space for quieter voices; respond to different opinions with generosity and love; speak the words, ‘I don’t know’; choose to be curious about our worlds; examine the world’s beauties and hardships; venture to share our stories and emotions with the world; trust that we have the skill and respect necessary to tell other people’s stories; remember the gamut of our lived experiences that have led us to the present moments; support each other to tell stories that are not being told; work hard and pursue our dreams.

My definition of bravery results from my lived experiences in Artista, but shares common ground with Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens’ (2013) “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces,” a comparison of the terms “safe” and “brave” that strives to create an authentic

environment to learn about social justice. At the start of the 2017 session, Miche recommended we introduce the Artista space to the participants as a brave one, which parallels Arao and Clemen's recommendation,

The term "brave space" at the outset of the program, workshop, or class transforms a conversation that is usually merely setting tone and parameters into an integral and important component of the workshop (pg. 1).

Artista's space is 'safe' in so far participants can expect that the stories they share will not leave the walls of the program. However, establishing the vocabulary of a 'brave space' at the outset of the program defines our expectation that participants take responsibility to push themselves outside of their comfort zones, which is essential to Artista's mandate to empower.

As for myself, I will continue to layer this practice of bravery into my practices as Artista program director and as a theatre artist galvanized by sharing important, challenging stories with my community. Embodying bravery in my pedagogical and artistic practices is and will continue to be crucial to stimulate my ongoing process of self-actualization.

Storytelling

Artista relies on storytelling as a central tenet of its process-based methodology, believing that sharing stories facilitates bonding between individuals as a chosen community. The practice of sharing our stories in a public way, whether they are stories based on our lived experience or stories mined from our imaginations, strengthens our voices and brings new texts into the world. Ahmed (2017) supports bringing new texts into the world:

Feminism is at stake in how we generate knowledge; in how we write, in who we cite. I think of feminism as a building project: if our texts are worlds, they need to be made out of feminist materials. Feminist theory is world making (p. 45).

In the Artista program, participants tell their own stories and perform them for a public. Artista, then, brings new texts representing the young, diverse, female perspective into the world. This practice of generating, performing and sharing stories is a first step towards hooks' (1994)

engaged pedagogy as a practice of freedom, which involves valuing students' lived experience as sites of knowledge and mining learning from these stories.

The stories generated in *Artista* unite us together as a collective, and provide opportunities to learn from each other, inquire, and expand our knowledge. Furthermore, the performance of these stories for an audience during the final outcome introduces new, creative, feminist texts. This is an opportunity for *Artista*'s audience and community members to become acquainted with voices less represented on public platforms. Ahmed (2017) argues that "theory can do more, the closer it gets to the skin" (p. 35), by which I take her to mean that there is immense power in articulating and promoting feminist theory that is inspired by individual's lived experiences. Lived experience translated into stories or theory reveal a concrete relevance to life. Whether the lived experience in discussion is shared by the reader or not, a text inspired by lived experience carries the power to offer an understanding of the feeling of "tread[ing] in someone's shoes," which I consider to be an important aspect in building empathy for the other (Spivak, 1990, p. 109).

Artista's space offers a fertile environment for participants to engage with the beginning stages of theatre creation and performance of stories inspired by lived experience. Within this space, discussion and reflection around the stories is inseparable from performance. Collective discussion and reflection on our storytelling and theatre making unearths self-doubt and fear of judgement, common themes that emerge in any process of storytelling. This requires that the storyteller make themselves vulnerable to the public eye. Engaging with these resistances with the support of collective dialogue strengthens the bonds of trust amongst participants and their mentors.

Storytelling is an engaging way of bringing forth new knowledge, which is essential within hooks' (1994) engaged pedagogy. Sarah's disclosure of her sexual assault ruptured the veneer of everyday life, asking all participants to consider her trauma and survival. It strengthened the bonds of trust between the members of the 2014 *Artista* ensemble. This experience was, to her, worth sharing, and she evidently felt comfortable enough in the learning environment to do so. The healing significance of telling one's story has been carefully unpacked in the discourses of psychology and psychoanalysis, and sustained engagement with these is beyond the scope of this thesis (Freud, 2016). Yet the narrative accounts I reflect on,

combined with feminist and pedagogic theory, convinces me that storytelling is a way to draw from personal truths and bring about a high level of commitment and engagement.

This particular memory fragment offers an opportunity to reflect on how I as Artista's program director and facilitator responded to personal stories brought into the space, especially charged ones like Sarah's. In this instance, I did not feel I had the tools to respond to Sarah's story as supportively as possible. I also reflect that Sarah might have brought her story into the room without expectations of receiving a response, but rather for the therapeutic benefits of simply sharing. The more experiences I gain in Artista's learning environment, the more I realize that often, an attentive, caring ear is all that is wanted/needed in a situation of personal storytelling. These encounters can be opportunities to think and be together, rather than purely reactive spaces beckoning particular responses or judgements.

Stories act as sites of inquiry and generators for creative content. Here stories come from difficult knowledge and an urgent need to speak. I connect this to what hooks (1994) refers to when saying,

[...] the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring. And if boredom should prevail, then pedagogical strategies were needed that would intervene, alter, even disrupt the atmosphere (p. 7).

The collective effort of storytelling is one such way to nourish commitment and trust in Artista's learning culture. By welcoming each individual's contributions to the learning space, learners and teacher/facilitators collectively create an open learning community (hooks, 1994). Individual contributions become sites inquiry for the group, democratizing the learning space, and providing opportunities for individuals to exercise a sense of individual identity and build a collective identity (hooks, 1994).

hooks' engaged pedagogy resonates with my personal teaching philosophy; I strive to create learning spaces that are transformative, where learners are challenged to become engaged, willing, critically thinking players (Ahmed, 2017, Freire 2000). hooks (1994) explains,

To emphasize that the pleasure of teaching is an act of resistance countering the overwhelming boredom, uninterested, and apathy that so often characterize the way professors and students feel about teaching and learning, about the classroom experience (p. 10).

The practice of storytelling offers the Artista participants a far more personal site for learning than what is focussed on in conventional education models.

Furthermore, the expectation for storytelling extends beyond the Artista participants to the team of Artista mentors and program directors. hooks' engaged pedagogy requires a holistic approach to learning, where both learners and teachers are asked to share, and thus both groups are empowered by this action. hooks explains,

[...] empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive (p. 21).

Artista mentors and program directors bring their own stories and lived experiences into the room as much as participants do, creating a mutually vulnerable environment for listening, sharing, reflecting and learning. That all artists involved in the program have instinctually offered their stories and lived experiences to share with participants reflects an understanding that storytelling is a instinctual tool for personal and collective learning.

Furthermore, I have chosen to thread personal storytelling through this thesis to practice expressing my stories through text. Through this medium, I interrogate my lived experiences as sites of potential knowledge to further the process of growth through a more permanent, less ephemeral medium, which is the written word.

Collective Creation

Paulo Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* offers that there is a difference between "education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination" (p. 4), the difference being that education as a practice of freedom does not emulate the power inequities that exist in society as a whole. Since Artista's third session, the team has been striving to operate through collaborative, collective strategizing and a developmental implementation of the Artista pedagogical model. This lateral working dynamic is the first step in breaking down power inequities within a teaching dynamic to democratize learning spaces. My memory fragment recalling the first Artista team meeting for the 2017

session reflects how the lateral working model enriched the vision for the session through the ideas shared by the members of the team.

In *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance*, Syssoyeva and Proudfit (2013) echo Freire's (2000) pedagogy in their explanation of how the collective theatrical creation space emerged as an alternative model to hierarchical power dynamics. They define collective creation as theatre practitioners collaborating in the creation of a theatre piece and "shar[ing] responsibility and power as fully as possible" (p. 3). They purport that collective creation offers the opportunity to,

[...] make of the artistic group a model for a better way of being together in the world, a space in which to enact, with a few like-minded collaborators, a backstage performance of a more civil society, or, failing that, a refuge from an oppressive socio-political landscape (p. 2).

I take this to mean that collective creation environments offer a space where artists practice their ability to collaborate while working together towards a shared artistic vision. With continued practice, this model stands as an alternative to the status quo, a non-hierarchical model of visioning projects and distributing power.

Artista has become more effective in enacting this collective, lateral model within the team of mentors and program directors, amongst the Artista participants, and between the Artista team members and the Artista ensemble members. Artista's model furthers that mentorship is not unidirectional from mentors to participants, but rather than the mentors have much to glean from the participants as well. The final outcome performance is an example of this collective, lateral creation model at work, one which offers participants an alternative method of collaborating with their peers once they leave Artista's space.

The lateral vision for the 2017 session came about in response to the challenges faced during the 2016 session, which resulted from disproportionate distribution of responsibility between myself and the rest of the Artista team. The resulting learning was the realization that I had to ask for help. This meant two things: firstly, I had to trust the other Artista team members with greater responsibility, and secondly, the expectations of the mentors had to be clearer from the outset of our time working together. My own educational upbringing championed independent thinking and initiative taking, which I believe manifested subconsciously in me and drove me to carry the majority of the weight of the program on my own shoulders. Trusting my

team mates with greater responsibility and clearly articulating this expectation of shared responsibility to the program, is a practice that becomes easier the longer I operate within this lateral model.

The start of the 2017 Artista session brought all of the mentors' and program directors' voices into the visioning of the upcoming program session, making their voices in the Artista learning space as important as mine. As program director and co-creator of Artista, I still offered an overall structure to work within based on my archive of memories from the first two sessions. However, as a whole, all members of the team were encouraged to offer input, and therefore all ideas had the potential to shape the session. I learned that while often it appears more efficient to work alone, in the long run the session is much enriched by the Artista team members feeling a greater sense of belonging and responsibility to the program by being more involved throughout the visioning process.

However, this lateral model of working also revealed limitations. The Artista team was capable of over-generating ideas, which then have to be distilled to be achievable within the 15-week time frame of the program. Being discerning and choosing some ideas over others is a difficult process, especially within a lateral model. I learned how important it was to return to Artista's mandate to prioritize ideas that were geared towards participant empowerment and community building to help choose. Additionally, the lateral working model privileges the loud and confident members of the team, which required that I carve out time and space for quieter voices to speak. Working within a lateral model offered significant challenges, and thus great learning, regarding specifying team member roles and responsibilities.

This lateral, collective working model requires that roles and responsibilities be defined with great specificity. As Syssoyeva and Proudfit (2013) explain of collective creation, "[it] accommodates for a lot of different processes, power, responsibility, structures and political values" (p. 5). Within Artista's environment, it was very beneficial to our functioning to establish that each of the Artista mentors would lead two workshops for the participants in a performance approach or theatrical method, that they be present for every session, and that they make themselves available outside of workshop time to offer feedback to participants. The setting of these expectations made for a smooth transition into a lateral working dynamic. In contrast, when roles, responsibilities and expectations were not clearly delineated within the

Artista team, as was the case during the 2014 and 2016 sessions, the mentors did not know how to be involved and therefore chose to be less involved.

This issue of role specificity was particularly present with the role of the Script Coordinator. While I did explain to both Sarah and Melissa, who held this position at different times throughout the Artista 2017 session, the general responsibilities of the job (collecting participants' creations into one document and shaping into a performable script in anticipation of the final outcome performance), these tasks were not specific enough to give Sarah and Melissa a sense of direction in their role. Playing a central role in the breakdown of Melissa's involvement in the program, was the amount of time required to be a script coordinator. Melissa took on the role of Script Coordinator as an internship through the Concordia Theatre Department, which required a lesser time commitment than what Artista requested of her. As such, we determined that she would attend three of the four hours of the Artista workshop, and attend every second team meeting, a schedule which deteriorated quickly as Melissa requested various concessions to this schedule. The breakdown of the schedule coupled with the fact that I did not hold her to stricter expectations of time commitment deteriorated into Melissa not participating in the program altogether.

I speculate that Melissa did not feel essential enough within the team to make her presence there worthwhile. Melissa became less and less a part of the collective; the less she attended the workshops, the less she was able to track the development in the participants stories which would feature in the outcome performance, which was the main component of her job as script coordinator. Additionally, she stopped attending our team meetings and therefore was no longer part of our evolving team dynamics and the ongoing visioning and planning process for the session. I expect that not being able to be fully immersed in her job of coordinating the script was a main reason that she did not finish the session with us, and as referenced in Chapter Two, did not attend the final outcome performance, which was disappointing for the participants themselves who had enjoyed her presence in the group. As a result of this experience, I am far more aware that collective team dynamics require a clear discussion of every individual's obligations within the team, including how much time every member must dedicate to their role.

The question of collectivity also resonates into the conversation about accessibility and breaking down barriers to entry. hooks' (1994) addresses this in her conversation about

bringing people into the room, which for Artista manifests as making it possible for participants of a great diversity of abilities and strengths to access the application process, as well as offering individuals with reduced mobility access to the performance venue. The Imago Theatre team is beginning to address this question of accessibility within Artista's application process as well.

For the past two years, we have offered the opportunity for applicants submit their applications in any form that they feel is best suited to them, including text, creative writing, and video. The hope is that young women who don't feel like writing is their strong suit can still apply through a video. However, this method excludes young women who are not technologically savvy or who don't have time to put into the application. If the Artista mandate is to empower young women in need, as it is, then we needed to produce an application system that brings a greater diversity of young women into the room.

This came up with Olivia in the Artista 2014 session, whose application I reference in Chapter Two. Her application would likely have been dismissed had there been a greater number of applicants. The learning that resulted from Olivia's involvement in the program was that though her application was slim, her need for the program was great. The adjustment made to the application process involved setting up a meeting with potential participants; we invited applicants whose applications were thin to meet with myself and this year's Associate Program Director, Dayane. These meetings, which welcomed two or three young women each, were an opportunity for conversation, a way to assess need and a chance to meet face to face. Our application process still needs work, but we certainly are getting better at bringing people into the room, and not privileging writing as a tool for expression, as not everyone has had access to the practice of these skills. The idea of bringing people into the room is becoming more fully realized with each annual Artista session.

Self-Actualization

Looking back over my scenes, I see moments of self-actualization unfolding over time. hooks (1994) champions the teachers' self-actualization of central importance to her engaged pedagogy. She explains,

teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students (hooks, 1994, p. 15).

Having started to create the Artista program as a young, 24 year-old woman, I became a mentor for other young women at a young age. I was always working with other women who were much more established in their careers than I. As co-creator, co-coordinator and now program director of Artista, I only started feeling like I was in a position to offer mentorship to younger women after pivotal experiences of skill development, support from advanced practitioners or full professionals, and mentorship in my job and craft as a performer and theatre creator. These experiences helped me begin to embrace my own passion, create my own original theatre productions, pursue acting as a career and take my work and desires seriously, which have then empowered me to become a more confident teacher and mentor for the Artista participants. For this reason, I intersperse stories of my own insecurity throughout my narrative to make transparent the role of my own growth and self-actualization within the narrative of the development of Artista's learning environment. Interrogating my own narrative, I see that I am in a far better position to trust my team members and offer them greater, more specific roles and responsibilities within the program if I feel confident that I am striving to grow in my craft as a theatre creator and performer.

This also ties into my storytelling with the participants; by engaging in the process of self-actualization, I am more willing to bring my stories into the room as sites of inquiry for us all to learn from. My stories reflect that I am doing what I am asking the Artista participants to do: be brave in the world and constantly push ourselves to become a more conscious, aware, empowered beings (Freire, 2000). I request that participants follow their dreams and therefore I must do the same.

When professors bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that we can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators. It is often productive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material. But most professors must practice being vulnerable in the classroom, being wholly present in mind, body and spirit (hooks, 1994, p. 21).

hooks (1994) engaged pedagogy highlights the intertwined nature of Artista's growth and my own; to become a great pedagog and facilitator of Artista's learning space, I must pursue my dream of being a professional performer which is a critical aspect of my own self-actualization. This is a journey on which I gladly embark.

CONCLUSION

The Imago Theatre team started Artista with a vision for social justice in the form of a theatre mentorship program, one that offered young women a truly feminist, alternative experience. Ahmed (2015) reflects my own observations that sexism remains persistent in “shaping worlds, determining possibilities, deciding futures” (p. 5). I see sexism active within the Montreal, Quebec, and Canadian theatre scenes in the distribution of power within theatre institutions; the majority of artistic directors, directors and playwrights are male, with few women and particularly few women of colour occupying positions of leadership. The storytelling on our stages reflects the same breakdown; the majority of stories are told from a white, male perspective. To assist in the transition towards institutional, intersectional equity and equity of representation in storytelling, Artista deconstructs the mechanics of power that maintain these system of oppression. Artista does so by offering a financially and physically accessible space where young women talk and listen to each other, learn from and with established artists, experiment with their craft through creation and performance of their own original stories, and support each other through this process.

Artista’s gender specific training space offers young women the opportunity to orient towards their worlds and practice extending their reach towards their stories in a gender specific environment free of the male gaze (Ahmed, 2006). Within the Artista team of culturally diverse mentors, program directors, and the ensemble of culturally diverse young women, there is no gaze limiting these young women’s capacity to reach towards their lived experiences and imaginations to tell the stories they are compelled to tell. Our hope is that given the the opportunity to practice storytelling in this environment, these young women will exit the program and return to their communities with a greater confidence to tell their stories. These stories are new, feminist texts that reveal the lived experiences of young women whose perspectives rarely receive a public platform.

I am proud of how much Artista has grown, and while I have the tendency to look back on previous sessions and search them for my own mistakes, participant reflections suggest a trajectory that resonates with my own as it unfolds in the memory fragments. Participants were positive about the experience overall and expressed that they learned important lessons about themselves and their worlds. Creating a program from scratch is not easy and growth and

change are a slow processes. The 2014 Artista session's scattered curricular focus, hierarchical team dynamics, and substandard participant-mentor bonds were essential starting points from which to galvanize Artista's growth and strive for more effective practices. These early stages of the program's growth also led to valuable, challenging resistances that spurred my ongoing process of empowerment, the process of which is reflected in this thesis.

Critical Tools of an Emerging Feminist Theatre Pedagogy

Various tools assist the Artista team in shaping the program's feminist theatre pedagogy. These are scheduled throughout each 15 week session to offer each ensemble experiences of empowerment through storytelling. The specific exercises programmed vary from year to year depending on the skills of the Artista team members, the interests of the participants of each annual session, and the session theme (ex. The 2017 session theme of Home and Belonging), which shapes the session's storytelling. The following theatre exercises and activities are amongst the ones used over the past three annual Artista sessions to empower participants and build an intergenerational community of emerging and established women actors:

- Assignment to interview members of participant's communities about the session's theme;
- Flocking (ensemble practice in listening through mimicking movement and sound);
- Group play (using rhythm, words and physicality to inspire playfulness);
- Mask making;
- Group mask manipulation workshop;
- Free writing;
- Ensemble movement to music (to encourage a practice of joy);
- Breathing exercises to ground the body and voice;
- Guided meditations to still the mind and develop grounded breath;
- Group vocal practice through song;
- Individual gesture development;
- Discussion and reflection in small groups, and as a larger ensemble.

These exercises, offered to the program by myself and the other members of the Artista team, are strategies towards collective work, storytelling and self-actualization. They have been tested at various times over the past three Artista sessions and have proven effective in supporting participant's practice of storytelling and forming bond between ensemble members. These exercises manifest in both direct and subtle ways in the outcome presentations of learning collectively created by participants with guidance from program directors and mentors.

Final Reflections

This thesis began by asking how, through prioritizing lived experience and narrative inquiry, feminist practice and theory might shape arts-based pedagogy and support and empower young artists. Artista's pedagogy offers a model for a theatre education environment that champions feminist, engaged, critical pedagogy. It does so by providing a learning space where participants, mentors and program directors are encouraged to tell their stories, where the vision and execution for the program happens in a predominately lateral way, where personal resistances are leaned into in order to engage in the ongoing process of empowerment, and where mentors and program directors are encouraged to pursue their own process of self-actualization in order to be the best teachers and facilitators possible.

While Artista does not intend to be an answer to the sexism that prevails in most spaces, Artista's curriculum does aim to chip away at hegemonic power distribution by shaping a model of theatrical creation that is lateral and collaborative and by offering a platform for storytelling to young women whose voices and perspectives are less heard in our media. Artista exists as a manifestation of positive feminist action, as a result of Imago Theatre identifying and naming sexism as present and prevalent in its community and as a result of my own personal experience self-actualizing throughout the process of creating and performing theatre with other women. Nourishing a community of young and established women artists creates a network of individuals who can rely on one another as allies in this fight towards greater gender equity in and beyond the performing arts world.

As for myself, I have become braver as a theatre artist and teacher alongside Artista. The process of writing this personal narrative of empowerment offers a unique entry point into my understanding of the multi-year process of the shaping of Artista's critical, feminist, engaged

pedagogy, a pedagogy which will continue shift and specify based on learning from future sessions. Imago Theatre continues to flourish under Micheline Chevrier's artistic direction and her vision for a brighter, more socially just world. With a conviction to mentor and offer professional opportunities to emerging women artists, and with powerful, artful storytelling at the heart of her vision, Artista moves forward to empower participants and build an intergenerational community of emerging and established women artists in Montreal.

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