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Radical Self-Care: Performance, Activism, and Queer People of Color

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Radical Self-Care: Performance, Activism, and Queer People of Color

by

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Dedication

To my younger self for teaching me everything I know of survival.

To all of our younger selves.

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Abstract

Radical Self-Care: Performance, Activism, and Queer People of Color

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Queer people of color in the United States are perpetually under siege politically, psychically, economically, physically, and affectively in the twenty-first century under capitalist white supremacist heteropatriarchy. *Radical Self-Care*, connects radical artivist performance in Austin, Texas with the theoretical genealogies of queer of color critique, women of color feminism, queer studies, and performance studies in order to propose a program for queer of color survival, sustainment and political revolt. Radical self-care is the holistic praxis that names the confluence of two distinct but inextricable processes developed in the first two chapters of this thesis. In chapter one, I take up the Generic Ensemble Company's workshop production of *What's Goin' On?* as a case study in order to theorize the 'performative of sustenance,' a mechanism of queer worldmaking and queer world sustainment defined by its erotic and utopian affects. Chapter two, through a discussion of reproductive rights activism at the Texas state capitol, reformulates the concept of 'parrhesia,' the Socratic practice of 'free speech' taken up by Foucault in discussions of the care of the self, into a performance praxis of speaking truth to power with the potential to interrupt hegemonic systems of oppression. The final chapter

explicates the ways in which these two mechanisms converge and operate as a dyad in the holistic process of radical self-care through an analysis of *Fat: The Play*, a devised work that premiered in Austin by and about fat queer femmes. Ultimately, *Radical Self-Care* aspires to offer queers of color a methodology of queer world sustainment that is also a program of political intervention, grounded in solidarity politics, into those systems of oppression that too often characterize queer of color existence as a project of survival rather than a project of flourishing.

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Chapter One:
What's Goin' On?

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare." –Audre Lorde

Today, as always, I seek refuge in the queer, minoritarian spaces of theatre and performance. It is the first rehearsal for the Generic Ensemble Company's workshop production of *What's Goin' On?*, a radical adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan*. The Generic Ensemble Company is a performance collective in Austin, Texas with the mission of creating "bold, body centered, and socially relevant theatre" performed by a mostly queer, mostly of color, and mostly woman identified selection of individuals. At this moment, I am gathered in a circle with the rest of the anything-but-generic ensemble and, among other feelings, I sense the various affective excesses of queerness, blackness, transness, Latinidad, fatness, able bodied-ness, diaspora, and whiteness circulating in the air of the rehearsal room.

Our director, kt shorb, truly more of a convener, introduces us to the 'check-in,' a ritual practice that would begin each of our gatherings for the rest of our process. On a typical day, we will say our names, our gender pronouns, and conclude with a comment about the state of our everyday and emotional lives. On this day, in addition to the items I've just mentioned, we are also to state our phone numbers (such that the other ensemble members may immediately index us into their communities), and our reason for being in this space, with this group of people, to be a part of this project. shorb, a Japanese

American genderqueer, begins the check-in process herself.[1] As the check-in circulates, I feel heartened, and made cautious, by the encouragement to state our gender pronouns. This gesture signals that in this space, with these people, this work will move with a conscientiousness of gender identity and presentation that allows all of us agency over our bodies and identifications. I note that as a masculine presenting sissy cis-male, my privilege is such that I will most certainly be safe in this space. That is, the most that I'll have to reckon with is discomfort as long as I take great care in caring for those around me.

Discomfort indeed: the 'check-in' moves around the circle, it is nearly my turn, and I become acutely aware of my own body and the power and privilege associated with it. In addition to being a cisgender male, I am half white. I am thin, able bodied, and I am a graduate student. I am also, however, a person of color, Filipino-American, queer identified, a sissy, and one of the youngest in the group. I am all of these things simultaneously. Other bodies in the room are trans*, variously disabled, black, or Latina/o. In other words, these bodies are differently located and, debatably, more oppressed than mine. It is my turn. "Hi, my name is James McMaster. I use he/him." I give my phone number, and posit my belief (paraphrased from Jill Dolan) that theatre and performance can provide a laboratory in which we can rehearse the sociopolitical worlds

[1] I insist on naming the various specific identity markers of my subjects in order to account for the diversity of bodies in the space as well as the particularity of each individual subject's positionality. I also identify them so explicitly with the knowledge that many of them pursue performance in order to give complex visibility to such identities and bodies.

that we wish would come into being.[2]

During the next portion of the opening ritual, kt walks us through a few ground rules that would anchor our engagement with each other and our work for the rest of our time together. "We are giving gifts," she professes. As no one is forced to participate in the workshop, one's actions during this time and in this space are all gifts, born of immeasurable generosity, which, for kt, is synonymous with a cultivation of 'no fear.' Such generosity is meant to allow the ensemble to take risks, to become intimate, and to commit the whole of themselves into the room. Other key ground rules include 'move up, move back,' a call for each of us to be aware of how much space we take up with our voices, bodies, and points of view in relation to our identities; 'ouch and oops,' a methodology for acknowledging microaggression and foregrounding accountability and allyship; and, finally, a plea for each of us to take care of ourselves, a reminder that caring for the self translates to care for the ensemble and vice versa.

In order to conclude the 'check-in,' we each participate in a 'sit.' For a minute we sit still and meditate, simultaneously together and alone. I breathe deeply. I clear my mind. I allow myself to be totally present in the space. I allow myself to feel content with my self, my body, and the affective baggage that I am encouraged to bring into this process. I allow myself to feel the community being created in this exchange: each of us finding a spiritual communion with the self so that we might find sensual communion with one another and make radical and political performance to sustain ourselves in the

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[2] Jill Dolan, *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance* (Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 2001).

face of abjection and oppression. The moment is erotic.

I open my eyes. I make contact with those around me. I do not turn away.

What I've just described, the process of the 'check-in,' illustrates the central theoretical contribution of this thesis: the praxis of radical[3] self-care. [4] In the context of this project, radical self-care refers to two inextricably connected processes. The first is the process by which theatre and performance practices activate erotic subjectivity in order to sustain a queer of color subject by ameliorating the bad feelings associated with living through, pulling from bell hooks, 'capitalist white heteropatriarchy.'[5] The second is the process of performing truth to power in order to disrupt and interrupt such an oppressive system. These processes enable one another and only constitute radical self-care when they are happening together. Over the course of this document I will complicate, explain, and clarify these cursory descriptions of radical self-care and its processes.

My use of the term 'capitalist white heteropatriarchy' to describe the various systems of oppression and marginalization faced by queer people of color on a daily basis in the United States draws from hooks but also alludes to the genealogy of scholars

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[3] Generally speaking, I use the term 'radical' both to indicate immensity and a far left political orientation, as well as etymologically. For me, when used etymologically, radical, or root, refers to the ways in which self-care and politics emerge from the root of one's identity and experience.

[4] 3 My use of the term praxis here merges several theories. On one hand I allude to the activist, pedagogical impulses behind the ways in which Paulo Freire and bell hooks use the term. I am also building on the Marxist use of the term as an engagement with alternative ways of being that seek to create change toward an unalienated world.

[5] hooks deploys the term '(imperialist) white supremacist capitalist patriarchy throughout her career in order to describe interlocking systems of oppression. I use the term capitalist white heteropatriarchy in a similar way. My adaptation of the term seeks to expand the significance of heteronormativity as an oppressive regime.

within the fields of women of color feminism, queer studies and queer of color critique that have taken such systems to task in their work. I follow M. Jacqui Alexander's examination of "the twin processes of heterosexualization and patriarchy- what Linda Hart calls 'heteropatriarchy'"[6] and I am energized by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's article "Sex in Public,"[7] as well as Cathy Cohen's "Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens,"[8] which each offer intersectional and highly political criticisms of heteronormativity and its always already present coconspirator, white supremacy. With these antecedents in mind, my project takes up the following question as its central inquiry with regard to radical self-care: how do theatre, performance, and activist practices better enable queer people of color, bodies that live and die at the intersections of oppressions and depression, to survive and to thrive under capitalist white heteropatriarchy?

This thesis and the concept of radical self-care itself take as a shared premise, from the field of affect studies, that the way we *feel* about our lives and ourselves has implications for our survival that are always already enmeshed with the political. To be clear, despite the genealogical debates about the particularities of terms like 'affect,' 'emotion,' and 'feeling,' this thesis follows Ann Cvetkovich's use of the term 'feelings,' in favor of, but also interchangeably with, 'emotions' and 'affect,' because 'feelings'

is intentionally imprecise, retaining the ambiguity between feelings as embodied

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[6] 4 M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and The Sacred* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 23.
[7] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex In Public." *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (Winter 1998): 547-566.
[8] Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ* 3 (1997): 437-465.

> sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences. It also has a vernacular quality that lends itself to exploring feelings as something we come to know through experience and popular usage that indicates, perhaps only intuitively but nonetheless significantly, a conception of mind and body as integrated.[9]

Inspired by Cvetkovich, this project takes seriously how white heteropatriarchy feels for queer people of color.

Throughout this thesis, I take up queer people of color as a discreet category of subjects that is created not by any sort of essential identity, but by an affective affinity resulting from similar experiences and subject positions. One way in which the category of queer people of color coheres, for instance, is through the shared intersectional experience of that which Cvetkovich calls 'depression,' "a way to describe neoliberalism, globalization, or the current state of political economy in affective terms."[10] I am inspired by Cvetkovich's move toward understanding global systems in terms of affect. However, in order to account for the multitude of feelings beyond depression named by the queer of color performance practitioners at the center of this project in their interviews (fear, anger, rage, insecurity, shame, apology, hurt, deep pain, and even jealousy of those with more privilege and opportunity), I turn to José Muñoz who argues that "what unites and consolidates oppositional groups is not simply the fact of identity but the way in which they perform affect, especially in relation to an official 'national affect' that is aligned

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[9] Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012), 5.
[10] Ibid 11.

with a hegemonic class."[11] I assert that capitalist white heteropatriarchy is a system that, when thinking it in affective terms as Cvetkovich suggests, becomes intelligible as the official national affect to which Muñoz refers. As such, my use of the term capitalist white heteropatriarchy, from here on, accounts simultaneously for a material, political economic system of oppression as well as for what Raymond Williams calls a "structure of feelings" that produces the coherent category of queer people of color through the named population's shared, uniquely intersectional experience of such a system.[12] Radical self-care, then, is a tactic for living through and dismantling capitalist white heteropatriarchy in both its material and affective structural forms.

To that end, radical self-care is most precisely understood as the sum of its parts: parrhesia and the performative of sustenance. As I've already stated, radical self-care is both the process of sustaining the lives of queer people of color under capitalist white heteropatriarchy, and, simultaneously, a move to interrupt, disrupt, and dismantle capitalist white heteropatriarchy. Parrhesia, a method of speaking truth to power with its legacies in Greek philosophy and later theorized by Michel Foucault, is the primary strategy employed by radical self-care in its protests and interventions against capitalist white heteropatriarchal systems of oppression and discrimination. Chapter two of this thesis details parrhesia at length and adapts the tactic for use by queer people of color in twenty-first century United States.

I began this first chapter and this thesis with a performative description of my

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[11] José Esteban Muñoz, "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Richardo Bracho's *The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)*," *Theatre Journal* 52 (2000): 68.
[12] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (London: Oxford UP, 1977).

own co-performance[13] within the Generic Ensemble Company's 'check-in' process both to foreground my own positionality as a queer performance practitioner of color and also to demonstrate the centrality of the self within this study. In other words, I attend to myself before I attend to others as a discursive performance of radical self-care's methodological impulses, which suggest that caring for others depends on a precedent of self-care. I continue this first chapter with an ethnographic account of the *What's Goin' On?* rehearsal process drawing from my own experience as well as formal interviews with the queer people of color in the ensemble. I utilize a performance studies based ethnography in conjunction with the theoretical strands of affect theory, woman of color feminism, and queer of color critique to develop the concept of 'the performative of sustenance,' a key constitutive element of radical self-care. The chapter concludes with a performance analysis of a scene from the workshop production of *What's Goin' On?* that performs the theory of the performative of sustenance for which I am arguing while simultaneously serving as an example of that which may result from utilizing the praxis of radical self-care in the theatrical rehearsal context.

The Performative of Sustenance

Performatives of sustenance are the stuff of radical self-care. They are moments in which performance activates something near what Audre Lorde calls 'the erotic' which she defines as "the personification of love in all its aspects- born of chaos, and

[13] I adapt the term from Dwight Conquergood in order to acknowledge that I am literally co-performing, in the theatrical sense, with my subjects while also assuming all of the dialogic relationality that Conquergood attaches to the term. Dwight Conquergood. "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," TDR 46.2 (Summer 2002): 145-156.

personifying creative power and harmony...creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives."[14] I wish to take this moment to mark that the erotic to which I will refer throughout this thesis is founded in and inspired by Audre Lorde's 1978 essay, "The Uses of the Erotic." In this essay Lorde speaks specifically of black women. I am using the word erotic to signify in ways that ring of Lorde's use but which refer to a broader range of queer of color lives and experiences. I recognize the sociopolitical risks associated with appropriating Lorde's theory for a broader queer of color counterpublic.[15] In making this move, I of course do not mean to suggest that queer people of color and black/African-American women share identical experiences of oppression. Nor do I mean to suggest that these groups are mutually exclusive; there are of course black queer women. I proceed with reverence, deference, and deep gratitude to the black women who enable the work that I do and I will use the case studies that I take up throughout this document to demonstrate the applicability of much of Lorde's description of what she calls 'the erotic' to marginalized populations that exist at the intersections of multiple experiences of oppression.[16] In other words, Lorde's understanding of the erotic, though meant originally and specifically for black women, might be able to save the lives of

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[14] This speech, delivered on August 25, 1978, has most notably been published in Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, (Trumansburg, New York: Crossing Press, 1984), 53-59.

[15] In a 2013 talk given by Patricia Hill Collins at Brandeis University, she discusses a pattern she observes of white feminist cooptation of black feminist thought and concepts. She specifically references a conversation she had about the term 'intersectionality' while on a panel with Kimberley Crenshaw. Here, I attend to the cooptation black feminist thought (attributed to white feminism) being discussed at conferences. I am simultaneously gesturing toward a need for these conversations around theoretical appropriation to sustain and proliferate across the academy. I hope to be a part of those discussions. Collins' talk can be found here: http://www.brandeis.edu/gittlerprize/videos/collinslecture.html.

[16] I would be remiss not to credit Kimberley Crenshaw for giving us the notion of 'intersectionality.'

other marginalized people as well. It is for this reason that I seek Lorde's guidance.

To be sure, Audre Lorde makes clear that our feelings go unrecognized beneath our daily experiences of patriarchal oppression and, I would contend, capitalist white heteropatriarchal oppression. Capitalist white heteropatriarchy places a stranglehold on the erotic and our capacities for feeling, empowerment, and creativity. I assert that the erotic in all of its creative and energetic empowerment is always already circulating in spaces of queer of color rehearsal, activism, and performance that proceed with and foreground a liberatory analysis of race, class, gender, disability, sexuality, etcetera. However, this circulation of the erotic requires practiced cultivation in order to achieve its maximum restorative, healing, and sustaining effects. I call these practices of cultivation performatives of sustenance.

More precisely, the performative of sustenance potentiates the empowering convergence of the sensual, the spiritual, and the political within the erotic as Lorde theorizes it. Anthropologist Lyndon Gill calls this convergence 'erotic subjectivity.'[17] Gill writes:

> Informed by Lorde, my articulation of the erotic expands beyond being mere euphemism for sexual desire and reaches simultaneously toward a political attentiveness and a spiritual consciousness. This tripartite political-sensual-spiritual awareness makes possible and desirable a more broadly and deeply conceived articulation of love. And it is this love that so often provides the motivation for political action, sensual intimacy, and spiritual hunger- together

[17] I employ Gill's work with the same sensitivity and care with which I employ Lorde's.

constitutive elements of an erotic subjecthood.[18]

Gill calls erotic subjectivity, "necessary, life saving praxis."[19] I will turn to the concept of 'erotic subjectivity' often throughout this thesis because of the potency with which this form of subjectivity constitutes self-care through a circulation of love that nurtures the self and the collective simultaneously.

Performatives of sustenance, the practices that generate and amplify the erotic, love, care, sincere recognition, and erotic subjectivity, do so from a space somewhere between Jill Dolan's "utopian performative" and Ann Cvetkovich's "utopia of ordinary habit." Dolan, drawing from J.L. Austin's notions of performativity, explains:

> Utopian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense.[20]

A performative of sustenance in its truest form is always already part utopian performative insofar as it lifts its participants into the unlimited skies of hope, above the present and above the presence of capitalist white heteropatriarchy as a structure of feeling. However, the performative of sustenance departs from the utopian performative as Dolan has formulated it in several key ways, and distinguishing the two from one

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[18] Lyndon Gill, "Chatting Back an Epidemic: Caribbean Gay Men, HIV/AIDS, and the Uses of Erotic Subjectivity" *GLQ* 18.2-3 (2012): 279.
[19] Ibid. 280.
[20] Jill Dolan, *Utopia In Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005), 5.

another enables a more precise understanding of the former. The utopian performative is primarily interested in the relationship between spectator and performer whereas the performative of sustenance, though it may also affect the spectator, is more interested in sustaining those involved in the performance practices at various stages in theatrical process. Furthermore, Dolan wonders about the utility of the utopian performative as a program for inspiring social change in the future because it exists most effectively as a feeling in the present. The performative of sustenance, though it enables a more just futurity, recognizes itself *as the social change* being enacted by theatre and takes seriously the effect that ameliorating capitalist white heteropatriarchy at the level of feelings has for queer people of color in the present moment. Finally, Dolan also describes the utopian performative as fleeting. The performative of sustenance, and by extension radical self- care, is a practice of sustainment. To that end, I suture Dolan's utopian performative to Cvetkovich's 'utopia of ordinary habit,'[21] which argues that consciously pursued and repeated action of the everyday can constitute a utopian reconnection to the self and a method of self-care.[22] Connecting these two concepts develops the performative of sustenance, a mechanism of radical self-care that mitigates the ephemerality and fleeting nature of the utopian performative by performing and re-performing it with the regularity of theatrical practice.

Why, then, do I move from a reformulation of utopian praxis toward the uses of

[21] Cvetkovich, *Depression,* 189.

[22] In her discussion of the 'utopia of ordinary habit' Cvetkovich opts to use habit over practice for its valences of ordinariness, unhealthy addiction, and obsession. I move in the other direction, thinking of performatives of sustenance constituted by a utopia of ordinary practice because of its associations with rehearsal and performance.

the erotic? While Dolan accounts for hope, intersubjectivity, and communitas under the rubric of the utopian performative, I assert that a utopia that consists of each of those affective qualities, once sustained in the present moment, is more accurately understood under the rubric of erotic subjectivity. To be clear, I do not mean to jettison the utopian in favor of the erotic, nor do I mean to position the two in a hierarchy, in opposition to one another. In fact, I offer that the performative of sustenance, even as it activates a version of erotic subjectivity, may also constitute a critical methodology for conjuring and sustaining the then and there of José Esteban Muñoz's queer futurity as a critical utopia in the present moment of capitalist white heteropatriarchal suffocation.[23] It is, however, my semantic and theoretical decision to refer to that which is critically utopian as erotic subjectivity in the context of this project because the erotic as I use it is always already attune to queer bodies of color, their affective contours, and their survival, in ways that many formulations of the utopian may or may not be. Erotic subjectivity, as yielded by the performative of sustenance, sustains minoritarian subjects in the here and now without a necessary regard for the then and there. It embraces feelings above, beyond, and below hope recognizing that the ability to feel any and all feelings, good or bad, at the deepest possible level is empowering. To be sure, the performative of sustenance, the erotic subjectivity it produces, and radical self-care itself are always already 'quare,'[24]

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[23] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU P, 2009), 3.

[24] E. Patrick Johnson, "Quare Studies Or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned From My Grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21 (January 2001): 1-25.

always already 'theories in the flesh,'[25] and always already tied to our creative impulses.

The Uses of The Performative of Sustenance

I return now to the Generic Ensemble Company and *What's Goin' On?* so that I might demonstrate how the performative of sustenance conjures a space in which queer people of color can temporarily release themselves from the feelings associated with capitalist white heteropatriarchy and find rejuvenation. The introductory practices of the sit and the check-in might seem insignificant as they only occur for the first few minutes of rehearsal. Yet, it is precisely the quotidian quality of these practices that allows the underlying political principles of the check-in to remain embedded in the larger training and rehearsal process. The simple act of allowing everyone in the room to come together and sit in a circle, speak their truth, claim their space, and feel heard by the other ensemble members dilutes unequal distributions of power that are endemic to other processes of theatre making. By equally positioning the bodies and voices of the ensemble as best as possible, the 'check-in' suspends feelings of marginalization (as much as possible) and limits the threat of microaggression, without suspending recognition of differential identity in the space and time of the rehearsal. Furthermore, shorb suggests, "both the sit and the check-in are like a way of marking, 'this is where we were and now we are together.' It's kind of a hailing, to hail people to being as present as they can possibly be."[26] The communitarian ethos of the check in process in conjunction with its call to the ensemble to be totally present in the space are two performatives of

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[25] Cherrie Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute P, 1981), 23.
[26] shorb, kt. Interview by author. Personal interview. Austin, November 18, 2013.

sustenance that set the stage for the holistic praxis of radical self-care in the GenEnCo rehearsal process.

What's more, the experience of discomfort during the check-in that I describe in my opening paragraphs gestures towards what Laura Gutierrez calls, "unsettling comfort."[27] That is, not only does one take comfort in knowing that the check-in unsettles the unacknowledged privilege of others in the space, especially those that benefit most from capitalist white heteropatriarchy. One's own individual comfort is also unsettled as one is held accountable and responsible for the ways in which they may perpetuate capitalist white heteropatriarchal oppression in the space. Michel de Certeau argues, "space is actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it."[28] The check in and the sit, then, actuate a communitarian space of unsettling comfort in which queer people of color in the ensemble can be totally present. With this, the groundwork is laid for erotic subjectivity. In the rest of this section I analyze the GenEnCo rehearsal process through the sensual-spiritual-political rubric of erotic subjectivity.

Allowing the sit and the check-in to account for my political case study while also recognizing that the political is embedded in everything, I analyze Viewpoints training as a site of sensual and spiritual performatives of sustenance enacted throughout the duration of the *What's Goin' On?* rehearsal process in order to begin to capture a more holistic account of radical self-care. Because many of the ensemble members of the

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[27] Laura G. Gutierrez, *Performing Mexicanidad: Vendidas y Cabareteras on the Transnational Stage* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2010), 17.
[28] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984), 117.

Generic Ensemble Company have never previously acted or participated in a theatrical production process, training the ensemble constitutes the largest portion of the group's rehearsal process. Having trained with the SITI Company, shorb spends about an hour of each four-hour rehearsal period training the ensemble in Suzuki, and spends another hour with Viewpoints training.[29] It is important to note that levels of theatre experience varied widely amongst the ensemble of the *What's Goin' On?* workshop. As such, while the training served as an introduction to performance for some, it also functioned to break the more experienced actors of their less useful habits. Above all, the training became a way to build ensemble and community, to bond us, and to ensure that we were all on the same page mentally, physically, and spiritually. While there is much that I could say with regard to Suzuki, I focus my discussion here on the erotics and utopian potential embedded in Viewpoints training in order to reflect the feelings of the ensemble members with whom I spoke during my field interviews.[30]

Viewpoints activates the sensuality of erotic subjectivity. During Viewpoints, we move with one another as if in a dreamscape. My focus is soft as I feel the breath and bodies around me. As if psychically connected, we each jump, turn, step, stop, and glance in perfect, unspoken, unison. I am reminded of child's play: we laugh at the silliness of each other's choices, each other's bodies, and our own insecurities. We laugh together.

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[29] The SITI (Saratoga International Theatre Institute) Company, a highly esteemed year round performance institute, was founded in 1992 by both Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki. SITI is most noted for combining the methodologies of these two directors, Viewpoints and Suzuki, into its performance training.

[30] In brief, Suzuki is a Japanese theatrical training practice that was invented by Tadashi Suzuki and his company as a means of cultivating stillness and control in the actor. For more information see *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki* written by Tadashi Suzuki and published by Theatre Communications Group in 1993.

We tell imaginative, impulsive, impromptu stories with our bodies which, in this moment, are centered rather than marginalized. We produce new meanings. We live different lives.

Philosophically, Viewpoints is a system meant to build ensemble, and bring a performer to a heightened awareness of other bodies, space, and time. Viewpoints demands that hierarchies are dismantled, and its calls to creative empowerment require collectivity. In *The Viewpoints Book*, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau name the gifts that Viewpoints offers us: surrender, possibility, choice and freedom, growth, and wholeness. I quote the authors at length here so that I might draw connections more easily between Viewpoints and erotic sensuality:

> Viewpoints relieves the pressure to have to invent by yourself to generate all alone...to be interesting and force creativity...[Viewpoints] helps us to recognize the limitations we impose on ourselves and our art by habitually submitting to a presumed absolute authority...Viewpoints leads to greater awareness, which leads to greater choice, which leads to greater freedom. Viewpoints awakens all of our senses...we receive information from levels we were not even aware existed and begin to communicate back with equal depth.[31]

The emphasis on extraordinary listening, exquisite awareness of self and others, awareness of time and space, self empowerment through collective empowerment, the liberation of ones own impulses, and the exploration of the depth of feeling: these are all

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[31] Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, *The Viewpoints Book* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005), 19.

practices of "sensory intimacy," a term which Lyndon Gill equates with erotic sensuality. As a repertoire of performatives of sustenance, Viewpoints liberates the erotic in each of us by moving us toward profound awareness, intersubjectivity, and freedom. As Audre Lorde says, "when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense."[32] As a collection of performatives of sustenance, the arsenal of Viewpoints makes us responsible to ourselves and, in so doing, allows us to reject suffering and oppression and move, instead, toward joy in communion with others.

The experiences of the queer people of color in the Generic Ensemble Company corroborate the erotic value of Viewpoints. Ensemble member Morgan Collado, a Latina trans woman, said in her interview, "emotions exist in the body, you know what I mean? And sometimes in our day to day life we're not checked in to our body to realize where those emotions are happening, but in Viewpoints you have to be checked in to your body...so I guess when I'm in Viewpoints mode I'm tapping into those areas of emotion that exist in the body."[33] Collado draws for me the value that Viewpoints presents in recuperating the erotic from a queer of color body that is disciplined and alienated from itself in day-to-day experience by capitalist white heteropatriarchy. Similarly, shorb rather beautifully professes her attachment to Viewpoints as a training regimen:

"the anarchist in me loves Viewpoints because it's proof that you don't have to be

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[32] Lorde, *Erotic*,1978.
[33] Collado, Morgan. Interview by author. Personal interview. Austin, November 20, 2013.

> a leader, you don't have to have a star, for things to be good. And people, when they have an open heart and when they are taking care of each other can strive towards things and can solve problems and can comfort each other and can support each other. So, there's something really beautiful about the ethos that Viewpoints tends to bring with it."[34]

Intimacy, sensuality, and the erotic flow freely through shorb's language. She elucidates, again, the ways in which Viewpoints, as a repertoire of performatives of sustenance, constitutes a methodology of radical self-care by cultivating the self in order to cultivate the collective and vice versa.

The interviews I conducted with the members of the ensemble, as well as the informal conversations that I've had with them, indicate that Viewpoints operates on a spiritual level as well. Adzua Gette, a black queer who identifies as two-spirit, relates Viewpoints to "having a spiritual moment but not being in church."[35] Returning to Lyndon Gill, we might understand spirituality as akin to "sacred metaphysics."[36] I use that definition as a starting point, but I also allow my definition to be shaped by the spiritual understandings expressed by the ensemble members in their interviews. For shorb, Viewpoints and performance constitute a spiritual space of Buddhist generosity where she confronts her fears. For Collado, Viewpoints offers an example of the ways in which performance operates as one of the biggest parts of her spiritual practice because

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[34] shorb, interview.
[35] Gette, Adzua. Interview by author. Personal interview. Austin, November 21, 2013.
[36] Gill, "Chatting Back," 280.

of the ways that it enables us to "connect to something that's greater than ourselves."[37] Perhaps what is most valuable from Viewpoints' regarding spirituality is its openness, its ability to enable the flourishing of a diverse range of spiritual experiences and interpretations simultaneously.

The rehearsal process for the workshop production of *What's Goin' On?* activated erotic subjectivity by implementing a diverse repertoire of performatives of sustenance, enabling queer of color subjects to better survive and thrive under capitalist white heteropatriarchy. The performative of sustenance, at its best, actuates a space of unsettling comfort that allows for an increased awareness of self and others and the formation of enduring collective bonds, community. Ensemble member, Saray Rosales, elucidates the feeling and the effect of the performative of sustenance:

> Working with so many people, all of y'all are so smart- it's so refreshing to get away from what a lot of my nine-to-five life is to the awesome queerness that was that ensemble. I'm getting tired of living in the very straight-laced white America. It's awesome to dip into this awesome paradise a day out the week, two days out the week.[38]

Saray's description epitomizes one of the optimum benefits of radical self-care and the performative of sustenance: a respite, an uninhibited, intimate experience of deep joy and relief from the affective stranglehold of capitalist white heteropatriarchy. In the final section of this chapter, I analyze a particular moment of the *What's Goin' On?* workshop

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[37] Collado, interview.
[38] Rosales, Saray. Interview by author. Personal interview. Austin, November 22, 2013.

production that performs the theories of radical self- care that I develop throughout this thesis.

Performing The Performative of Sustenance

A moment of the *What's Goin' On?* workshop performance, staged in May 2013 at the Salvage Vanguard Theatre in Austin, Texas, holistically exemplifies the uses of the performative of sustenance. The moment acts as theory in performance. About half way through the thirty minute long piece, the performers enter the audience space and beg patrons for some form of sustenance. Performing starvation and thirst, the actors beg, seduce, and/or intimidate their crowd for food and water. This moment of the piece plays on the production's guiding question taken from Brecht's original text, "how can I be good when everything is so expensive?" by demonstrating the lengths to which human beings might go in order to sustain themselves when capitalist exploitation threatens to drag bodies across the border between health and malnourishment. In other words, the moment illustrates yearning and the necessity for radical self-care amongst queer bodies of color that results from the disenfranchisement of marked bodies under the exploitative system of global neoliberal capitalism.

As with all transitions in the piece, the snap of an ensemble member's finger signals the scene change and three queer of color bodies (a Latina trans woman, a black genderqueer, and a black cisgender woman) stand in a line, confidently facing the audience: three pillars of truth. The rest of the ensemble sits, kneels, and lies at their feet. These ensemble members focus solely on those who are standing; we listen intently. During the production process, we playfully called this moment 'storytime,' a title that

captures the aesthetic of the staging. That is, the staging resonates with various scenarios of storytelling in American culture: kindergarten storytime, the reading of scripture, congressional proceedings, the reading of a verdict, and, of course, theatrical performance. In short, the staging invites the audience to join the ensemble in a careful and attentive listening practice, a practice that, in this moment, constitutes a performative of sustenance.

The three standing ensemble members simultaneously take their cellphones out from pockets and bras, open their notes, and begin to speak from what is written on the screen. They speak the three different texts simultaneously: an excerpt from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, an original poem by ensemble member and poet Morgan Collado titled "Because You Can't Spell Courage Without Rage," and a monologue collectively devised by the ensemble that draws on histories of scientific experimentation on human subjects. There is no modulation of volume amongst the speakers' voices. They are all equally loud, each vying to be heard over the other storytellers for the duration of their text. The themes of the pieces being read flow into and out of one another; they struggle against one another; they are silenced by one another. They are also living together, overlapping and intersecting in a single moment's assemblage. Discourses of post-colonialism, love, critical race theory, self-care, microaggression, community, experimentation, anarchy, and theatrical convention contend with one another to reach the desired audience in the loud multivocality of the moment.

The scene reflects the reality of our social world's saturation with modern, global,

and, often, competing critical and theoretical discourses as a result of the proliferation of social media and other technologies of communication. Each of the three performers reads their speech from the screen of a cellphone extracted from their person. This is a statement not only on the ways that the body has become tethered to social interaction via its attachment to cellular technologies of communication. It is also a performative reversal of the impersonality of the ways in which political opinions circulate on message boards, through tweets, and in the comment sections of blog posts and YouTube videos. By performing and embodying, as a speech on a physical stage, that which might otherwise remain inscribed in the virtual, the moment makes visible the ways that allied discourses have to compete for space and shared audiences in a technological world that allows for information to flow beyond the maximum receptive capacities of the individual consumer. By making these mechanisms visible, and by reversing those mechanisms through embodied theatrical performance, the piece exemplifies the intersubjective, intimate, embodied, collective, political, and sensual qualities of the performative of sustenance and, thus, radical self-care. By foregrounding the body in these intersubjective ways and by emphasizing active listening in both its performers and audience members, the moment argues that theatre and performance activate the erotic, and, more specifically, erotic subjectivity.

The texts and language of each of the three pieces spoken in this short scene mutually constitute a performative of sustenance in the form of erotic subjectivity, each from a subtly different angle. Collado's poem "Because You Can't Spell Courage Without Rage," in particular, demonstrates the sensual-spiritual-political nature of erotic

subjectivity. The piece speaks out against injustice by tangling such violent transgressions with the everyday methodologies of sustenance that fall under the rubrics of courage and rage, rubrics that are inextricable from one another. I include the piece in its entirety here:

> Because courage is more than flying a big fuck you flag./It is surviving those tiny indignities everyday./It is waking up,/kissing your lover/drinking coffee and cigarettes as the sun rises/because courage is sometimes seething in silence/bearing witness to injustice/and bitching about it to your community/because courage is saying no/even if you are terrified./Because courage is saying yes/even if you a frightened./Because you can't spell courage without rage./Because you can't spell courage without rage./Because you can't spell courage without rage.

The piece speaks directly to the microinteractions that culminate in the sensuality of erotic subjectivity. This portion of the longer poem, excerpted for the purposes of the script, focuses on the quotidian 'tiny indignities' that queer people of color have to face on a daily basis. Collado ruminates on the social and sensual intimacies of 'kissing your lover' and 'bitching to your community.' These two activities in a different context may have dissonant associated feelings attached to them, love and irritation for instance. Taken in context with the rest of the poem, though, these two portions speak to the notion that one cannot spell courage without rage. In other words, one must deeply feel the rage incited by injustice in order to be empowered personally and collectively. This incitement and empowerment function as an inextricable affective dyad of erotic subjectivity within

radical self-care for queer people of color.

The public performance of this affective dyad of courage and rage is entwined with the political qualities of the erotic as well. As Audre Lorde says in this thesis' central theoretical text,

> as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.[39]

This passage, again, reinforces the idea that the ability to act in defense of oneself, to care for oneself, can be motivated by one's deep feelings of dissatisfaction with their sociopolitical station. The affective dyad of courage and rage, then, operates as a sort of call to intimate action towards the ends of self sustainment, collective sustainment, and, potentially, political intervention with the goal of social change. Collado's poem, as it intersects with the erotic, exemplifies the ways in which my formulation of radical self-care constitutes that to which Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner refer in their article "Sex In Public" when they write "the queer project we imagine...is to support forms of affective, erotic, and personal living that are public in the sense of accessible, available to memory and sustained through collective activity."[40] Crucially, though, radical self-care steps beyond the project of queer worldmaking that interests Berlant and Warner and, additionally, through the performative of sustenance, operates as a mechanism of queer

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[39] Lorde, *Erotic,* 1978.
[40] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex In Public," 547-566.

world sustainment.

The other pieces spoken during this scene of *What's Goin' On?* threaten to overpower Collado's poem and, by extension, radical self-care, even as they also push back on the discourses that marginalize queer bodies of color in the United States. The Fanon, performed by Adzua Gette, exposes the legacies of colonialism and racism that queer bodies of color must face, in the ways that "You Can't Spell Courage Without Rage" discusses, on a daily basis. At almost every performance of *What's Goin' On?*, the reading of *Black Skin, White Masks* would be the last to finish. When this happened, the line "The black man wants to be white. The white man slaves to achieve a human level" would be heard on its own as the dust of the overlapping speeches settled. The affective consequences of this moment are disheartening and politically depressive, to be sure, which speaks to the palpably felt need for radical self-care, as a practice and a discourse, to have the last word.

In my next chapter, I will discuss a theoretical framework of radical self-care that buttresses the erotic and erotic subjectivity, especially in their political manifestations: Foucault's notion of fearless speech, parrhesia specifically. Let me be clear, the community building and community sustaining potential embedded in the performative of sustenance undergirds the radical potential of radical self-care. Caring for ourselves and one another with erotic love is radical and revolutionary. However, self-care is not a complete act for queer people of color unless it includes equally radical, purposeful, and performative political action taken against the systems and laws that materially and affectively oppress us; only through such action will we ever be totally liberated. In

chapter two, I will adapt the concept of parrhesia so that it may prove useful to queer people of color by taking up the political activism of Yatzel Sabat at the HB2 proceedings in the Texas State Capitol during the Summer of 2013 as my central case study.

Chapter Two:

This Bill Will Kill Women!

On June 25th 2013 Texas state senator Wendy Davis staged an eleven-hour filibuster in an effort to kill Senate Bill 5 (SB5), a legislative measure with grave consequences for reproductive rights in the state. SB5 would ban abortion in Texas after twenty weeks. The bill would effectively ban all legal abortion in west Texas and along the Mexican border with a requirement mandating that abortion providers be licensed as ambulatory research centers. The bill offered no exceptions or qualifications, even in the cases of rape or incest. The threat posed by SB5 to reproductive rights in the state of Texas was incredible, the bill's passage would be catastrophic. Though Wendy Davis emerged from her filibuster a national celebrity, this chapter humbly attempts to capture the rage, truth, passion, risk, danger, strength, and political intervention of the (extra)ordinary protesters who put their lives on the line for reproductive rights in Austin, Texas during the Summer of 2013.

While, Davis' filibuster was epic in its resolve against the capitalist white heteropatriarchal imperative to control the bodies of those most affected by abortion legislation, her efforts alone would not have been enough to kill the bill in the first special session.[41] In the time leading up to the bill's final day in the senate and the Davis filibuster, thousands of protesters signed up to testify against the bill for three minutes at

[41] I resist flattening those affected by SB5/HB2 to the category of women. I refuse to call reproductive rights women's rights. While this rhetoric has been picked up in most mainstream media I refuse to erase the reality that trans men, genderqueers and other gender non-conforming individuals are also deeply affected by reproductive rights, abortion rights, and reproductive justice.

a time: a moment the media termed 'a people's filibuster.' On June 25th, at the eleventh hour of the Davis filibuster, lieutenant governor David Dewhurst removed Davis from the floor suggesting that she had gone off topic and that she was illegally using a back brace to support her as she stood. As the republicans called the vote, another people's filibuster roared from the gallery and beyond in the rotunda. Chants of "shame" resounded in the senate chamber as the people's voices overwhelmed the moves of senate conservatives. In the rotunda, screams aimed at stopping the proceedings reverberated in the bones of hundreds of protesters for reproductive justice; bodies vibrated with a collective feeling of outrage and resolve.

Though the republicans argued that the vote was successfully logged before midnight, positing that the bill had passed, lieutenant governor Dewhurst eventually yielded to the fact based democratic insistence that the vote was actually logged after the midnight deadline at 12:03am on the 26th of June. As a result the bill did not pass during the first special session. However, almost immediately, Texas governor Rick Perry called a second special session for the legislature; SB5 became HB2 and the bill was back on the table. Texas law states that the governor sets the agenda for the legislature and has the power to call as many special sessions as he desires, an utterly deflating and disheartening reality for liberals, progressives, and radicals involved in the struggle for reproductive justice in Texas. The people would need to reconjure the certainty and drive that motivated their protests and filibusters for another thirty days in order to kill the bill again.

This chapter follows Yatzel Sabat, a queer woman of color, and her performances of parrhesia in protest of HB2 throughout Rick Perry's second special session. While chapter one developed the concept of the performative of sustenance, this chapter develops the other half of radical self-care, parrhesia. My contention, developed most fully in chapter three, is that radical self-care is the nexus of these two concepts. I take the concept of parrhesia from Foucault's *Fearless Speech,* a collection of lectures that discusses parrhesia, originally a Socratic notion, at length, with special regard for its connection to the care of the self. Parrhesia, which literally translates to "free speech" in English, is, for Foucault, a speech activity consisting of five major components: frankness, danger, criticism, truth, and duty. In short, for Foucault, parrhesia is a risky, agentive speech activity that speaks critical truth to power as a result of an ethical duty to the self or others. Sabat's protests during the second special session provide an ideal case study with which to adapt Foucauldian parrhesia so that it may be useful as a weapon against capitalist white heteropatriarchy in the twenty-first century. In what follows, I describe Sabat's protest actions, drawing from a personal interview and a number of YouTube videos which document the events, in order to argue that parrhesia must move beyond speech and must also account for the body in space and time.[42] Simultaneously, I will reconfigure each of the five essential qualities of parrhesia so that they might supersede limits set in place by Socrates and Foucault so that parrhesia may become useful as a mechanism of radical self-care for queer people of color.

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42 "Civil disobedience in Texas on behalf of women and reason. Part 1," YouTube video, posted by olechka772, July 10, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2c6TZz0RSs&list=FL177v0LlQJETVwhqWNFL1Tw&index=27

I wish to pause briefly here in order to qualify, outright, that I cite Foucault reluctantly, hesitant to turn to perhaps the most canonical influence in Western philosophy, a white homosexual man, in order to theorize the survival and thriving of queer people of color. Much of Foucault's writing on parrhesia was an exploration on its relevance, usefulness, and problematization outside of a classical Greek context. My extrapolation of parrhesia from Foucault mines that which is useful from the concept for queer people of color in performances of radical self-care. As such, while I mourn the fact that utilizing these ideas will necessitate the use of certain jargon, I understand Foucault and his formulation of parrhesia as crucial and integral inspiration to my project, a project that seeks to theorize something altogether different and new for the queer people of color about whom and with whom I write this thesis.

Performing Parrhesia

On July 10, 2013, Yatzel Sabat sat in the gallery of the Texas state assembly planning symbolic resistance to a vote that would move HB2 into the state senate for its final stages of legislation. "As a queer woman of color, I object to these proceedings! What you are doing is an injustice! This is a travesty! There are people who are not being represented fairly…" these were the words with which Sabat excoriated her interlocutors when the vote was called earlier than any of the protestors expected. Sabat offers a frank criticism of the Republican agenda and the legislative proceedings, frankness and criticism being two of the five qualities Foucault associates with parrhesia. For Foucault, frankness means that the "parrhesiastes acts on other people's minds by showing them as directly as possible what he actually believes… the speaker emphasizes

the fact … that he himself is the subject of the opinion to which he refers".[43] To rephrase Foucault, parrhesia often takes the form of an 'I statement' that demonstrates that the speaker is offering an opinion that is definitively theirs. The speaker, also known as a parrhesiastes, says exactly what is on her mind without holding anything back and while accepting full accountability that this is, in fact, her view. Sabat's immediate acknowledgment of her own subject position claims ownership of her statements and accountability for her criticisms.

Criticism in parrhesia, for Foucault, can either be directed at the self or an interlocutor, but is always embedded in unequal power relations. In Foucauldian parrhesia "the speaker or confessor is in a position of inferiority with respect to the interlocutor. The parrhesiastes is always less powerful than the one with whom he speaks".[44] Sabat's frank criticism of the HB2 proceedings is clear: the proceedings are an injustice and there are people who are not being represented fairly. She speaks from a less empowered position relative to her interlocutors, which include not only the elected representatives but also the anti-choice protestors who are present in the gallery. This collective population is mostly white, mostly male, and mostly (if not entirely) heterosexual. Many of them, as well, are elected officials or troopers ordained with power by the state. I understand power, in this context, to be determined by how much or how little one benefits from the affective and political economic circumstances of capitalist white heteropatriarchy. I reconfigure Foucauldian parrhesia here: by conceiving of power

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[43] Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 13.
[44] Ibid. 18.

as more related to myriad social powers and privileges than it is related directly to state designated positionalities, I prioritize the quotidian and activist potentials of parrhesia under capitalist white heteropatriarchy in the twenty-first century. In this way, parrhesia is always already political without necessarily being attached to interactions with democracy proper or state institutions.

We should pause again here to acknowledge a significant departure that I take from Foucault and Socrates. It is at this point in Foucault's lectures, the section on criticism, when he discusses the ways in which slaves and women, in 'democratic parrhesia,' are unable to fully access the use of parrhesia as non-citizens in the Greek period. Lacking an impulse to prop up citizenship, recognizing (non-)citizenship as unique from slavery and/or womanhood in today's context, and critical of the insidious flaws of democracy that become visible with the HB2 proceedings, I reject the paradigm of democratic parrhesia and, in its stead, unmoor parrhesia from the state and the government at all.

As I will continue to demonstrate, my formulation of parrhesia fundamentally rejects that one's status as a woman or non-citizen can restrict one's use of the concept. Quite the contrary, in line with my priorities in quotidian and activist imperatives, it is my contention that minoritarian or disempowered status with regard to gender, citizenship, race, religion, class, ability, sexuality or any other axis of identity, largely absent from Foucault's analysis, makes an individual more equipped to occupy the role of parrhesiastes with regard to radical self-care. To quote Jack Halberstam, "it's on the

margins of society that you find the most potent critique."[45] Furthermore, many scholars have acknowledged the culture of color blindness and the liberal impulses that contribute to the silencing of frank discourse around issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, etcetera.[46] With this culture in mind, the overt mention of race, for instance, is always already considered frank in spaces that operate according to the capitalist white heteropatriarchal paradigms of respectability, post-raciality, and, as Lisa Duggan has pointed out, neoliberalism's trivialization and obfuscation of identity politics.[47]

To be totally clear with respect to parrhesia, Foucault would understand Sabat's frank criticism as a speech activity. Foucault writes in *Fearless Speech*:

> I use the phrase 'speech activity' rather than John Searle's 'speech act' (or Austin's 'performative utterance') in order to distinguish the parrhesiastic utterance and its commitments from the usual sorts of commitment which obtain between someone and what he or she says.[48]

In the above passage, Foucault suggests that parrhesia, as a speech activity rather than speech act or a performative, does not necessarily *do* anything in the world. It is simply a critical truth delivered as one's opinion at personal risk out of a sense of duty. Secondly, while Foucault speaks extensively of parrhesia as a speech activity, he does not theorize parrhesia as a practice of performance that is necessarily embodied or corporeal.

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45 Halberstam, Jack. 2013. "Going Gaga: Chaos, Anarchy and the Wild." Iciberlin, February 6. Last accessed February 7, 2014. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjvLMvF7CfM

46 For more on this I recommend: *On Being Included* by Sara Ahmed, *The Feeling of Kinship* by David Eng, and *The Twilight of Equality?* By Lisa Duggan, among other salient texts.

47 Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon P, 2003), 21.

48 Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 13.

To some extent, I agree with Foucault: parrhesia exists as something other than a performative insofar as a performative affects some sort of legitimated, 'real' change in the world. Performance theorist Diana Taylor writes "in political, rather than linguistic terms, we might say that performatives belong to the realm of internal cohesion, clearly defined authority, enabled by popular consensus producing a recognized, agreed upon 'real.'"[49] The moment when the vote on HB2 is called, for instance, constitutes a performative. The assembly's agreement with the authorized actor's request produces a real change in discursive and corporeal realities: a vote. In Sabat's case, however, her condemnation of the HB2 proceedings, aside from slowing the course of events with the help of other protestors, does little to nothing in the way of altering that course of events: unrepresented parties are not suddenly represented as a result of her statements; the legislators do not come to their senses; the vote goes on; and the bill passes. She is not endowed with the legitimating authority to enact any agreed upon change with her use of parrhesia.

Parrhesia, as I intend to use it, rather than acting as a performative in the Austinian sense, is closer to that which Taylor calls an 'animative.' At this point, I turn to Taylor's writing in "The Politics of Passion" at some length in order to situate parrhesia solidly in a constellation of performance, affect, and political activism. Taylor writes:

> animatives refer to actions taking place in the messy and often less structured interactions among individuals. They encompass embodied, at times boisterous,

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[49] Diana Taylor. "Politics of Passion." E-Misferica 10.2 (2013): n. pag. Web. 7 February 2014.

> contradictory and vexed behaviors, experiences and relationships. This then is the realm of the potentially chaotic, anarchist, and revolutionary.[50]

Suitably, Sabat identifies as a die-hard anarchist, preferring parrhesiastic animatives in public space to, for her, the futile exercise of voting rights within an unsalvageable state. Etymologically, Taylor's animative invokes movement, life, the soul, and the body in addition to certain affective qualities such as "courage, resolve, and perseverance."[51] Furthermore, especially with regard to the violent events at the Texas State Capitol, it is important to internalize the following:

> animatives terrify governments whose main goal is to control bodies through the mobilization or threat of force, or the use of performative edicts, decrees, and official utterances with the force of law. They also challenge on-lookers who respond differently to spectacles of defiance and resistance. Who controls the action? For better and for worse, animatives lack the legitimating structures, authority, and hierarchies that empower performatives.[52]

Though Taylor's concept of the animative emerges in 2013, over a decade after Foucault's *Fearless Speech* is compiled and published, the text can serve as an apt extension to Foucault's conceptualization of parrhesia. The two would agree that parrhesia is not a performative, as do I. Foucault's parrhesia, a speech activity that J.L. Austin might have understood as a constative, benefits from the political charge that Taylor helps me to infuse into the term. Parrhesia fails as a performative precisely

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

because it lacks the legitimating qualities associated with a unified state or a centralization of power. As an animative, however, parrhesia threatens to (and often does) disrupt, interrupt, and intervene in the reality conjured by the state's performative.

Furthermore, parrhesia as an animative, as opposed to an Austinian performative or Foucauldian speech activity, is rooted in the body. When I refer to the body here, I follow the set of assumptions that Diana Taylor outlines in 'Politics of Passion, "while I do not want to essential the notion of bodies, let's assume that due to specific historical, phenomenological, and political reasons these bodies give at least the illusion of ontological stability and coherence."[53] My reformulation of parrhesia, with Taylor's help, pushes Foucault by reconfiguring parrhesia into a practice that includes both speech and embodiment. We must recognize the significance of corporeality's always already present interplay with speech activity in live interaction. Sabat's speech activity and her corporeality converge into what I call a 'performance of parrhesia.' In using this language, I account for the body's ever-presence in the parrhesiastic act. Such a reconfiguration of parrhesia, then, rather than existing simply as a practice of speaking truth to power, is more powerfully a practice of *performing* truth to power.

Corporeality matters with respect to parrhesia as performance. It matters that Sabat's brown, tattoo covered body stands in the gallery of the Texas state capitol wearing an entirely black outfit. It matters that her head is shaved as she waves a finger at the Texas state legislature. When Sabat suggests that "there are people who are not being represented" it matters that her own body can act as a visual aid in imagining just what

[53] Ibid.

sorts of bodies are not being represented fairly. Consider the effect that a woman as visually queer as Sabat, standing up in the gallery of the lone star state, dressed in all black, and pointing her finger at the senate has for the spectators and actors of the HB2 proceedings. She disrupts preconceptions and structures of feeling that frame both sides of the debate. Her gender presentation, dress, marked body, and physical comportment form an implicit critique at the idea of whom the imagined individuals affected by the bill are. Her silent display, in itself, shatters the fourth wall of the political theatre and levels a frank criticism at the proceedings of the second special session.

Sabat's frank criticism ignited the affects and energies of the crowd around her. Her surrounding allies, all dressed in orange as a sign of solidarity with reproductive justice, began to cheer so loudly that her language became inaudible. Her truth captured the imaginations and the feelings of those who shared it, and so initiated and exacerbated the flow of what Teresa Brennan called "energetic affects."[54] Her protest brushes against Dolan's utopian performative, inspiring hope in the face of overt subjugation. In this moment, the moment of spectatorial reaction to Sabat's performance of parrhesia, we witness the radical political feelings that can emerge in response to attempts to control an unsatisfied populace through the use of repressive performatives.

The constituents in the gallery of the Texas State Capitol, throughout the HB2 proceedings, had been silenced by state performatives. The state put forth rules over those in the gallery mandating that no one have their cell phones out and no one speak too loudly. Transgressors would be escorted outside of the gallery by armed state troopers

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[54] Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2004).

and, in some cases, arrested. According to several reports, these rules were mostly enforced on those deemed troublemakers by the powers that be. This most often included people in orange, as opposed to the Christian coalitions and others with pro-life views dressed collectively in blue. Sabat, in an interview I conducted with her months later, also felt that her identity as a queer woman of color marked her as a target for discipline by police officers in and around the capitol, a fact that exacerbated the risk of danger that is always already endemic to performing parrhesia.

A Dangerous Repertoire

In the midst of the crowd's supportive roar, police converge on Sabat. As they grip her arms and pull at her body, she drops her weight to the ground. Her physicality demands that the male police officers carry her body out by her arms and feet. She is dead weight. Her body performs truth to power as it lies limp in the arms of, presumably, heterosexual, cisgender men who drag her out of the gallery. Simultaneously she screams, her voice taking on the raw quality of a torture victim: "THIS BILL WILL KILL WOMEN! THIS BILL WILL KILL WOMEN! THIS BILL WILL KILL WOMEN!" and over and over again she screams those words until she is forcibly removed, by troopers, out of the gallery, down a flight of steps, across the capitol rotunda, and onto the street in front of the capitol building where they let her lie beneath the sun under scorching temperatures around ninety-five degrees Fahrenheit.

In the gallery, the people applaud: some for Sabat, some for the state.

For Foucault, this kind of danger is intrinsic to parrhesia. Because parrhesia is performed in circumstances of power inequality, the one performing parrhesia always

puts themself at risk of danger when speaking critical truth to a more powerful individual, collective, or institution. The powerful cannot use parrhesia in order to speak a frank critical truth to the disempowered because they do not risk danger in a significant way. Foucault also argues that the danger of parrhesia occurs as a matter of scale. He acknowledges that parrhesia can occur amidst a disagreement between friends, wherein the parrhesiastes incurs the anger of a companion. He also acknowledges, though, that using parrhesia can be a life or death activity. Foucault writes:

> When you accept the parrhesiastic game in which your own life is exposed, you are taking up a specific relationship to yourself: you risk death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken.[55]

This passage exposes one of the manners in which parrhesia operates as a mechanism of self-care. Foucault implies that the choice to risk death derives from a desire for a truthful life, at any cost, over a life in which the truth must remain hidden. This implication echoes, like the closet, with narratives, identities, and relationalities of queerness. Parrhesia, in truth, life and death, is an animative textured by queerness.

Yatzel Sabat's own queer of color performance of parrhesia exposes the concept's sometimes life or death quality. Sabat draws on what Diana Taylor would call the "repertoire." For Taylor, "the repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of

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[55] Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 17.

meaning…the repertoire too, then, allows scholars to trace traditions and influences."[56] In her moment of protest, Sabat draws from the repertoire of civil rights and AIDS activists in the United States. Her embodiment invokes the repertoire of lunch counter sit-ins and AIDS die-ins. She performs corporeal death as parrhesia; she is dead weight. Death manifests in the limp stillness of her body, a heavy physicality for those carrying her. But dead weight must also be understood semiotically and metaphorically here. Sabat assumes the full weight of all of her subjugated identity categories: queer, woman, of color. She performs the inevitability of death in proximity to the state for someone of her own subject position. She enacts her own murder as she screams prophesies of the murders of other women. "THIS BILL WILL KILL WOMEN! THIS BILL WILL KILL WOMEN!" The space of HB2 legislation murders her as if it is completely absent of the air she needs to breathe. The inability of her elected officials to even acknowledge her existence murders her. Her proximity to law enforcement, the troopers who grip her flesh, murders her. And yet, she would rather be the movement's martyr than live in a world wherein the truth is suppressed by white heteropatriarchal tyranny.

Accountable Truth

As I've already implicated with my analysis thus far, the message of parrhesiastic performance, whether verbal, physical, or both, must necessarily be true in order to qualify as parrhesia. For Foucault,

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[56] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003) 20.

> the parrhesiastes says what is true because he *knows* that it *is* true; and he *knows* that it is true because it is really true. The parrhesiastes is not only sincere and says what is his opinion, but his opinion is also the truth. He says what he *knows* to be true.[57]

For Foucault, the biggest problem with parrhesia is the problem of truth. How can we know that what a parrhesiastes says is true? How can they know that what they are saying is true?

This problematization persists in my theoretical reconfiguration of the practice, but the pursuit of provisional answers to these questions is crucial in the formulation of radical self-care as a useful mode of survival. Foucault writes, the crisis concerning the function of *parrhesia* has to do with the relation of *parrhesia* to *mathesis,* to knowledge and education-which means that *parrhesia* in and of itself is no longer considered adequate to disclose the truth."[58] With regard to Sabat, and queer people of color more generally, my response to this quotation, and this first crisis with regard to truth, is straightforward. I argue that when one speaks from the root of their own subject position, especially as a minoritarian subject, as Sabat does in the given instance, they are actuating what Foucault calls an "exact coincidence of belief and truth."[59] They know it because it is their experience. Her protest begins "as a queer woman of color." In this sense, frankness about one's own experience and the knowledge received from that experience are inextricable from truth telling. This understanding of parrhesia takes

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[57] Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 14.
[58] Ibid. 72
[59] Ibid. 14.

seriously the feminist adage "the personal is political." Indeed, black feminism, women of color feminism and, by extension, queer of color critique are founded on the principle that personal, performatic,[60] and embodied narrative constitutes a mode of performing truth to power that must be valued as such.[61]

The question around truth that more directly problematizes this study refers to education and knowledge and the privilege they endow upon those who possess them. Foucault notes:

> The *parrhesiastes*' relation to truth can no longer simply he established by pure frankness or sheer courage, for the relation now requires education or, more generally, some sort of personal training. But the precise sort of personal training or education needed is also an issue.[62]

When parrhesia is used to speak to issues outside of the lived experience of one's own subject position, that which is spoken or otherwise performed is less self-evidently true by virtue of the clout given to personal experience. Truth, then, requires a precise, potent, and erudite analysis of the interlocking systems of neoliberal capitalist white heteropatriarchy in instances when one is not speaking from the well of personal experience and its associated feelings. Often this expectation for analysis acts as a wedge, fracturing marginalized communities and movements along class lines according to the degree of education to which they've had access with regard to social politics. Given

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60 I use the word 'performatic' to distinguish, as Diana Taylor does, that which has the character of performance from that which is performative in Austinian or Butlerian terms.

61 The works of Gloria Anzaldua, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, E. Patrick Johnson and Janet Mock exemplify

62 Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 73

this, the parrhesiastes runs the risk of reinforcing power imbalances and systemic inequalities if they speak an educationally informed truth to those who haven't had the same degree of access to education, especially in instances where lived experience contradicts or complicates learned theory.

Reconciling the problem of truth for parrhesia as it pertains to radical self-care requires both an expanded understanding of what is meant by truth as well as a contextualized realization of accountability, alliance, and analysis on the part of the parrhesiastes. Truth must be understood less as a matter of fact and more as a matter of informed impact. A parrhesiastes performing against capitalist white heteropatriarchy, whether in a protest or theatrical setting, should be considered to be truth-telling when, to the best of their intersectional analysis, both the intention and the impact of their action are in alliance and solidarity with those most at risk of harm in relation to that against which the parrhesiastes is performing.

It is crucial, however, that the parrhesiastes is unfalteringly accountable to the impact of their performance. This fact has implications for activist call out culture, the culture of exposing one another's privilege or complicity with oppressive systems in organizing, ensemble, and institutional contexts. If someone calls out the parrhesiastes on a problematic performance from a place of more informed analysis, alliance at closer proximity, or personal experience, the parrhesiastes must take responsibility for misspeaking another's truth with sincerity and recompense. 'Calling out' is, itself, an act of interpersonal parrhesia. The ouch, oops, used by the Generic Ensemble Company mentioned in chapter one exemplifies the kind of calling out and accountability necessary

for truthful parrhesia. To clarify, if accountability, analysis, and alliance are disjointed so much as to reify systems of oppression or cause further harm to the disenfranchised individuals or communities in question, this is not truth and the performer is not using parrhesia. Ultimately, truth as it pertains to parrhesia in radical self-care moves beyond the binary of fact and fiction and recognizes the relativity and impossibility of truth in the context of identity based politics. Truth becomes a process, a Sisyphean project, a feedback loop that allows the act of parrhesia to circulate through spheres of accountability, alliance, and analysis as a means of striving for a far away, ultimate, collective truth grounded in a politics of issue based solidarity.

Feeling Duty

The criterion of duty establishes the use of parrhesia as an ethical position. "Telling the truth is regarded as a duty" that can be performed within quotidian contexts of power relations or larger scenes of conflict such as the Texas State capitol.[63] One might perform parrhesia out of duty to oneself, another, a community, or a cause. Significantly, Foucault establishes that one cannot be compelled to use parrhesia. One must perform parrhesia agentively, performing the truth totally of one's own volition from a sense of duty.

Further, when we talk about parrhesia as a 'sense of moral obligation,' or a 'sense of duty,' we must understand the word sense in terms of affect and feelings.[64] If we understand 'to sense' as a cognate of 'to feel,' then duty becomes both an ethical position

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[63] Ibid. 19.
[64] Ibid. 19.

and a feeling simultaneously; duty is an ethical feeling. Accepting this, parrhesia becomes a tactic to trigger Taylor's 'politics of passion,' or "the mobilization of affect for political ends on collective, structural, and trans-ideological levels that skirt the tradition of organization of political parties and practices (such as lobbying or voting)."[65] The ethical feeling of duty, then, should be understood, in the singular moment, as both an affective response and a circulation of an 'energetic affect' amongst the proximal bodies and salient spectators.

From where does this sense of duty come? The understanding of duty as feeling exposes the slow work of building political consciousness. When I asked Sabat why she took the action that she did against HB2 in the face of physical danger, legal rammifications, and increased identity based surveillance and oppression, she responded with the following.

> It was unacceptable to me… knowing full well that its about money and its about control, as a woman, as someone who's poor, and someone who's brown- I'm just like, 'there's no fucking way, there's no way,' I couldn't not do anything. I feel like access to abortion and safe abortion is a major step to collective liberation. I feel like it's a basic human right.[66]

Sabat, in her own words, describes the sense of duty she felt to resist anti-choice forces in the Texas state legislature as a poor woman of color. The sharp analysis she brings to her direct action is not only informed by her own marginalized identity markers, but it is also

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65 Diana Taylor, "Politics of Passion."

66 Sabat, Yatzel. Interview by author. Personal interview. Austin, January 15, 2014

informed by her work as a reproductive justice organizer for many years in the city of Austin. I assert that Sabat's parrhesia is motivated by an ethical feeling of duty that emerges out of the coalescence of her analysis, experience, and the affectively charged atmosphere of the HB2 proceedings.

In essence, I am suggesting that parrhesia does not simply arise out of a knowledge of right and wrong but, rather, that parrhesia as a sense of duty emerges out of the feeling that something is wrong and must be refuted or resisted. In Sabat's own account of her reasons for performing parrhesia she says, "I couldn't not do anything."[67] Her tone and body, when answering that question, quivered and jolted in ways that indicated her belief in the self-evidence of what she was saying. The double negative arose out of a struggle to find the words to describe the almost ineffable sense of duty that she felt. She seemed to be responding to a visceral recognition of the stakes of survival; it recognizes that in order to thoroughly sustain one's life, and similarly situated lives of others, it is necessary, one's duty, to confront power with truth as a means of interrupting and intervening in the dominant systems that necessitate a practice of survival in the first place. Returning to parrhesia as animative, Sabat found herself 'moved' (as in animated) to action, and her feeling of duty circulated through the crowd as many of them applauded and screamed in affirmation of her performance.

Collaborative and Collective Parrhesia

Sabat's performance of parrhesia did not end when she was dragged out of the capitol gallery by her limbs. After carrying Sabat into the elevator, out of the elevator,

[67] Sabat, Personal interview.

across the rotunda, and out the doors, the arresting troopers set her down on the road outside of the capitol while they waited for a police car to take Sabat away. The heat oppressed at over ninety-five degrees as five male troopers hovered over Sabat's body awaiting her inevitable incarceration.

Incidentally, while she was carried Sabat's skirt slipped up above her knees. The troopers entreat a nearby woman for a "shawl or something" to cover Sabat, imposing a respectability politics on her body even in her arrest, even as she lay still and silent. The woman in question is Lisa Fithian, a lifelong activist. She responds to the trooper, "only if she's willing to have it used." The trooper turns to ask Sabat if she's willing to be covered by the shawl, to which she responds in the affirmative. Fithian covers Sabat's legs and pelvis with the orange blanket, repeating the phrase "your body, your choice. Your body, your choice."

Sabat appears a martyr in this moment. She lies motionless covered in orange, the symbolic color of the reproductive justice movement against HB2. Her arms outstretched in a Christ-like manner, she is slain by her government, her elected representatives, the men charged with protecting her, and the accident of her compounded marginalizations. The police officers stand oblivious or complacent. How can a queer of color female body continue her parrhesiastic struggle against the state even in social death?

Though Sabat's body is motionless, we must not confuse her stillness with passive participation. She allows her body to become a symbol, a canvas, a battleground on which the reproductive rights movement fires its semiotic shots. She actively draws from the repertoire of civil disobedience throughout her acts and, in so doing, actively

performs parrhesia and, thus, resistance. Consider, too, the degree to which Sabat risks danger in participating in this protest performance. She lies under the false smokescreen of passivity, but, as a queer woman of color in the custody of a police state, no such smokescreen guarantees safety, longevity, humanity, or livelihood.

It is also crucial to realize that this performatic event, from Sabat's initial protest until the moment she is dragged off in the police car, contains multiple performances of parrhesia by more than one parrhesiastes. Though her body does not lie on the line in quite the same way, Fithian, in placing the blanket on Sabat embodies a frank truth, risks danger, offers criticism, and fulfills her duty as a woman by doing her part to reclaim public space and honor Sabat's social death. She likely faces no immediate consequences from the state, but by covering Sabat's limp, socially dead body in the color of reproductive justice, she successfully extends the effects of Sabat's performance of parrhesia. Further, Fithian's attention to the power dynamics between Sabat and herself, the fact that she actively sought and privileged Sabat's consent when beckoned by the state trooper, honors Sabat's sacrifice and continues to center Sabat's positionality in genuine solidarity.

Fithian's solidarity and Sabat's martyred body demonstrate what should be an obvious characteristic of parrhesia: parrhesia is more sustainable and, perhaps, more effective when it occurs in collective, collaboration, and solidarity. I've turned to Sabat and Fithian to illustrate one radical, performance of parrhesia that visibly and sonicly interrupted the space and time of capitalist white heteropatriarchy at the Texas state capitol during the HB2 proceedings. However, neither the two women could have done it

on their own. Without Sabat screaming her very visceral truth in the gallery and forcing the troopers to treat her like a dead body strewn across the capitol steps, Fithian's statement of bodily autonomy, both with her words and the curation of her orange blanket, would have been evacuated of its meaning. Likewise, without Fithian's statements and symbolic interventions, Sabat's performance of parrhesia may have stagnated on the capitol steps, her body a less meaningful casualty in the war for reproductive rights.

Their performances of parrhesia escalate in significance as a collaborative act. The critical meanings are more meaningful. The danger is less palpable. The truth seems truer in two bodies and two statements. Protests, rallies, marches, and social movements- these are instances of parrhesia as a collective performance. The people's filibuster and the echoing screams of "shame" reverberating in the bones of hundreds of impassioned constituents reveal the potency of performances of parrhesia on a grand scale. While I turned to Sabat's isolated instance of parrhesia primarily as a means of communicating and adapting the concept in queer of color terms, I passionately subscribe to Taylors 'politics of passion.' Such visible disruptions, like Sabat's performance of parrhesia as animative, incite and cohere in collective parrhesiastic performances necessary for maximum intervention into capitalist white heteropatriarchy as both a system of policies and a structure of feelings. Put another way, parrhesia is more powerful when it is collaborative because it is then undergirded by the performative of sustenance, an idea I will continue to unpack in my final chapter.

The Limits of Parrhesia

The question of sacrifice and risk is not to be understated in conversations about parrhesia. On the evening of July 12th, the Texas state senate finally passed the omnibus abortion bill HB2. Wendy Davis, the Texas state democrats, the reproductive rights protesters, and Yatzel Sabat had all finally lost the battle that they had been fighting throughout the Summer. The war, however, on both sides, was not yet over.

In response to the bill's passage, Sabat and several other radicals planned to chain themselves to Governor Rick Perry's office door. Many of the most radical protesters, those who had already been arrested or deemed troublemakers by the state in the context of these proceedings had been banned from the senate gallery. Unable to reach Perry's office due to immense crowds of protestors, Sabat and company staged a sit in outside the doors of the senate chamber. A much larger crowd of protestors dressed in orange, filming the protest on their cellphones, surrounded the sit-in, which consisted only of a small number of individuals. Simultaneously, at this point in the evening, Texas state troopers blocked all the major exits and entrances to the capitol. Their specter was great and palpable. They were felt as well as seen.

According to Sabat, the police and security overseeing the sit-in promised the protesters that when it was time for them to disperse they would be warned before any aggressive force would be used. Despite this, when the moment came to disperse the protesters, there was no warning, nor any form of kind request from state troopers. A wall of state troopers moved, en masse, into the crowd of sit-in participants. The protestors held on to one another; they struggled, non-violently, to hold their ground. The claim to

space is, after all, a claim to existence. An immobile crowd of reproductive rights protestors on the floor of the Texas state capitol would send a message to the state legislature and Governor Perry: we are here to stay; the state will not do away with us. As if fully aware of the stakes, troopers tore the sit-in participants from one another. They pulled bodies apart with such force that the momentum of one protestor's removal from the protest left him lying in a pool of his own blood after his head smacked into the building's floor. At least two women were tased when they refused to remove themselves from the protest. Sabat was the only one of the sit-in participants to be arrested, most likely because she had already been taken in for protesting unjust legislation.

Throughout this scene of brutality, those protestors not involved in the sit-in ensured that the world would see the violence that the Texas state (troopers) used against its peacefully protesting participants. There are several video accounts of the violence to be found on the internet, and many of these were taken on the cellphones of reproductive rights activists. My own analysis emerges out of a compilation of these videos.[68] These videos constitute what Ann Cvetkovich calls "an archive of feelings" insofar as they communicate the electricity of the energizing affect of the moments they capture.[69] Even months after Sabat's protest performance, the arrests of several friends at the capitol and the violence taken against peaceful activists, the emotional burden of writing on this topic has been immense. The act of taking the videos arises from the following attitude, "the

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[68] "#HB2: Final Vote through Senate, Arrest Footage & Jail Support (July 12th & 13th)," YouTube Video, posted by "Ronnie Garza," July 15, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l06Co43xujw&index=3&list=FL177v0LlQJETVwhqWNFL1Tw

[69] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures,* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003).

world is watching." As such, the videographers and the videos themselves operate as animatives that inspire an affective response to the sometimes oppressive uniformity of the performative which, in this case, is characterized by the passage of HB2.

The blood, the tasing, the tearing of bodies from other bodies, the image of tens of troopers converging on innocent and nonviolent protestors: I stress these realities to remind us of the immense dangers that can be associated with parrhesia. While a powerful tactic for disruption, interruption, and intervention into political, economic, and affective regimes of white heteropatriarchy, parrhesia on its own is not a sustainable enterprise. It always costs to perform parrhesia. Capitalist white heteropatriarchy inevitably pushes back against resistance. As such, accounting for its collaborative strengths and its limits, it becomes quite clear that parrhesia requires the performative of sustenance. It requires the fuel that love, the erotic, and community provide for direct political intervention.

To clarify, the act of parrhesia is a risky, agentive act of performing critical truth to power as a result of an ethical duty to the self or others. Parrhesia, therefore, is a crucial coordinate of radical self-care. My final chapter takes the performative of sustenance, theorized in chapter one, and parrhesiastic performance, theorized in chapter two, and galvanizes them into the holistic methodology of radical self-care. I take up the rehearsal and performance processes of *Fat: The Play*, a devised piece about queer fat femme identity, to explicate the ways in which the performative of sustenance and parrhesiastic performance merge into radical self-care in my final chapter.

Chapter Three:

Radical Self-Care

Radical self-care is the confluence of parrhesia and the performative of sustenance. The performative of sustenance as a standalone mechanism provides sustenance, healing, and builds community among the queer of color subjects who activate it. However, the performative of sustenance without parrhesia fails to act explicitly as a project of changing the system that necessitates such sustenance, and, thus, results in an endless cycle of need and necessity without the potential for unencumbered flourishing. Likewise, parrhesia as a standalone mechanism is a practice of political intervention that is inevitably unsustainable. Radical self-care activates affective sustenance in order to fuel the disruption and interruption of capitalist white heteropatriarchy. It enacts political intervention in order to move toward a world wherein affective sustenance is a given, rather than earned, for those on the margins. Radical self-care does not exist without both parrhesia and the performative of sustenance operating simultaneously in entangled, messy, nuanced, and necessary ways.

In the previous two chapters, I've analyzed theatrical and activist practice separately in order to theorize the disparate components of radical self-care. As I've thus far described radical self-care in theatrical practice, it is most fully realized when its rehearsal process is characterized by performatives of sustenance and when its performances for outside audiences aggressively pursue a practice of parrhesia. As an activist practice, the performative of sustenance is realized throughout the process of

organizing, while parrhesia is used in the actual event of demonstration or protest. This is not to say that parrhesia cannot be used during the rehearsal or organizing practices. This is also not to suggest that various acts of parrhesia are not required in the process of organizing and that the act of protest demonstration cannot elicit the affective benefits of the performative of sustenance. To be clear, the performative of sustenance requires collectivity while parrhesia can either be a collective or solitary performance. In any case, however, parrhesia and the performative of sustenance exist simultaneously both in process and in performance (as process is always already a performance and performance is always already a process) within radical self-care.

Perhaps as a result of the messy simultaneity of the performative of sustenance and animative parrhesiastic performance in radical self-care, I must now address the potential slippage between the performative and the animative within my theory. It is true that the performative of sustenance might also be termed 'the animative of sustenance' insofar as the animative privileges feelings, the body, political revolt, and lacks the legitimating structural and hierarchical authority that Diana Taylor ascribes to J.L. Austin's 'performative.' However, I use 'performative' in 'the performative of sustenance' in order to situate myself and the term within a larger theoretical genealogy of performance theory. Performance studies, after Austin, has since situated the 'performative' solidly in the body. I also intend to invoke performativity with the performative of sustenance for its reiterative qualities, as the performative of sustenance intends to reiterate a safer space within which erotic and utopian feelings can sustain queer people of color. Finally, in using the term 'performative of sustenance' I intend to

position myself as a direct offshoot of Jill Dolan's 'utopian performative' for the embodied, affective, hopeful, alternative, utopian, and communal textures associated with it.

Before I proceed with my final chapter, I wish to stress that these mechanisms about which I am writing are not all together new phenomena. My project is to excavate practices of care and political intervention. My work is in naming, complicating, extrapolating, and arranging the constitutive practices of the performative of sustenance and parrhesia into a larger, more holistic, sustainable, and useful methodology. That methodology is what I call radical self-care. This third and final chapter, then, will continue my mixed methodological approach to trace the praxis of radical self-care, as a holistic process, through a single exemplary case study: *Fat: The Play*, a devised theatre piece performed at Austin's Frontera Festival. This event is an example of artivism, the name I use for the performance form that most lends itself to a practice of radical self-care. The body of this chapter will explore *Fat: The Play* as an artivist model of radical self-care, and I will conclude this project with a meditation on the humble limits and urgent potentialities of this thesis' central theoretical contribution.

Revolting Theatre

In November 2013, something beautiful began in Austin, Texas. Jules Pashall, a white fat queer femme cis female genderqueer, in celebration of her birthday, called a gathering of her friends, other fat queer femme's. Little did Pashall's guests know, this birthday gathering would mark the advent of *Fat: The Play* and, with it, a reclamation of their own lives. Over the next three months, this group of fat queer femmes (Jules

Pashall, Althea Clemons, Nicole Arteaga, Danny Miller, Caleb Luna, Erin Burrows, and Sandra Porcel) would meet, eat, write, devise, heal, unpack, cry, laugh, eat some more, and celebrate their lives as fat people from different contexts and intersectional positionalities.[70] Ultimately, although their ensemble began as a writing group, *Fat* was destined to perform its truth as a part of the Austin Frontera Festival's short fringe at the Hyde Park Theatre.

Fat: The Play serves as a very clear and very potent case study for the coalescence of the performative of sustenance and parrhesia into the holistic artivist praxis of radical self-care. In order to provide insight into the writing, staging, rehearsal, and devising process I've conducted interviews with the performers of color (Caleb Luna, Althea Clemons, and Nicole Arteaga).[71] Using these interviews I will demonstrate that a radical landscape of care and sustenance emerges as integral to the creative process that yielded *Fat*. Following this discussion, I provide a close reading of key moments in the play, specifically as they were performed at the play's premiere at the Hyde Park Theatre on February 7, 2014. The heterogeneous nature of the audience's personal, affective, and analytical relationships to fatness, queerness, femmeness, and race coupled with the performatic force of *Fat* resulted in a unique convergence of the performative of sustenance with a performance of parrhesia that conjures radical self-care in the space and time of the theatrical event itself. *Fat: The Play*'s utility as the central case study for

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[70] This chapter does not discuss Porcel's contributions to the play as she did not participate in the performance of the piece due to scheduling conflicts.

[71] I center the experiences of the queer ensemble members of color both because this project takes up queer people of color specifically and also to continue to center the experiences of people of color in queer/solidarity based work.

this third and final chapter, ultimately, has everything to do with it's exposure of the inextricable relationship between the performative of sustenance and parrhesia as well as the portrait it paints for the nearly utopian potentiality for solidarity based queerness in radical self-care.

Usually once a week, 'the fats,' as the group became affectionately known to its participants, would gather in one of their homes to celebrate one another in a process of undoing similar traumas and internalized oppressions. At the beginning, many of the ensemble members didn't know one another well or at all, but each of the fat queer femmes of color that I interviewed expressed that their participation was motivated by a pointed desire to find fat queer femme community. By the time I conducted my interviews, nearly a month after their first performance, the ensemble spoke of one another with love, friendship, and uniquely enduring bonds. Althea Clemons, a fat cis-female queer black femme, expressed the following of her cast-mates in her interview: "They're like my closest friends right now. They really support me, and I feel safe when I'm around them. I've shared a lot more of myself with them than I think I have with anyone else in my life."[72] In order to trace the path from acquaintanceship to the place from which Clemons speaks, we need to constellate the erotic subjectivity generated by the multiple performatives of sustenance utilized throughout the devising process. Such performatives primarily included uniquely configured writing, sharing, rehearsing, and eating.

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[72] Clemons, Althea. Interview by author. Personal interview. Austin, February 25, 2014.

The script of *Fat: The Play* is written entirely by its ensemble. Script writing prompts included fat community, sexuality, and selfies as well as the weekly investigation 'today, my fat is…,' a call to discuss how each of the ensemble members experienced their fat on a daily basis. The ensemble would respond to the prompts at home in free writes, sometimes in stream of consciousness, and bring them to share with the larger group at the next meeting. Caleb Luna, a cis-male fat brown femme queer, describes the writing process as "really fucking hard," and "a really intense emotional process." He stresses: "I had a lot of shit to deal with."[73] The shit to which Luna refers is, oversimplified for the purposes of space and comprehensibility, the totality of internalized racism, anti-fatness, misogyny, heterosexism, and shame.[74] Metaphorically, the pain derived from exposing, untangling, and purging oneself of internalized oppression might be likened to lifesaving surgery insofar as it requires cutting oneself open, apart, and then sewing oneself back together. Nicole Arteaga corroborates and provides another point of view on the process: "we would eat and laugh and cry and we would share these really, really long histories of trauma that we've had based on our fatness and our brownness and our queerness and all these other points of marginalization."[75]

Each of the ensemble members I interviewed expressed some version of what Arteaga articulates here which speaks to radical self-care as a communal space-making praxis. The space actuated by fat queer femmes actively centering fat queer femme

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[73] Luna, Caleb. Interview by author. Personal interview. Austin, February 25, 2014.
[74] I resist the use of terms like 'homophobia' and 'fatphobia' because of their ableist connotations.
[75] Arteaga, Nicole. Interview by author. Personal Interview. Austin, February 26, 2014.

justice, fat queer femme personal history, and fat queer femme creative work is a space of what Laura Gutierrez's 'unsettling comfort.'[76] It is extremely uncomfortable, painful even, to engage in the process of bleeding the affective poison of internalized oppression from one's body. However, there is a comfort that flourishes in the reminder that others share that pain and experience the excruciating healing with you. In other words, the sharing of mutual, though not identical, stories of trauma became a bonding agent and a community building exchange of feelings.

The testimony from both Luna and Arteaga, in addition to describing a space of unsettling comfort, articulates an activation and a complication of the erotic and erotic subjectivity through the writing process. Audre Lorde writes:

> the erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves.[77]

The tears, the laughter, the difficulty, and the trauma that occurred during the writing process emphasize the depths to which the ensemble felt the consequences, realities, and truths of their fatness, queerness, brownness, whiteness, poorness, femmeness, and other otherness. As Arteaga cites, the depths of these feelings are attached to deep histories, and with those histories, deep political oppression. Lorde notes that oppression

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[76] Gutierrez, *Performing Mexicanidad*, 2010.
[77] Lorde, *Erotic,* (1978).

suppresses the erotic. So, logically, the collaborative undoing of internalized oppression is simultaneously the collaborate unleashing of a politicized, sensual, and intersubjectively spiritual erotic subjectivity in each of those involved in the ensemble resulting in a process of collective self-actualization.

This erotic collaboration, the fact of fat queer femmes working together to liberate and amplify their individual and collective life forces, constitutes an affective community building and relationship building praxis. The sort of relationship that arises out of *Fat*'s writing process, for Clemons, is "one built out of trust, and care, and love, and it's a lot like self-care…a lot of it is other people letting me know that I'm a priority no matter what. That counts as self-care for me." Clemons touches on one of the most central concepts to radical self-care: community building and relationship building or, put another way, queer worldmaking.[78] Putting in the necessary work of caring for others in a context in which they are also doing the necessary work of caring for you is one way to practice self-care that refuses the myth that self-care is solely the responsibility of an individual to care for themselves. When this myth is fully dispelled, self-care removes its mask and presents itself for what it really is: a radically political, sensual, and spiritual act, a path into erotic subjectivity. The *Fat* rehearsal process is political in its explicit body politics. It is sensual in the corporeal intimacy it engenders among its participants. Its spirituality emerges, if not out of religiosity, out of quotidian intersubjectivity that is,

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[78] This mention of queer worldmaking alludes to the use of the term in the final chapter of José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, (195-200).

itself, sacred.[79] The performance, then, of erotic subjectivity in a space of unsettling comfort through writing, sharing, and feeling together constitutes one performative of sustenance employed in the larger constellation of *Fat The Play's* methodology of radical self-care.

The radical act of breaking bread together is another performative of sustenance employed by the ensemble of *Fat: The Play*. Arteaga describes the experience:

> It was super casual. Someone would cook dinner for the group and it was just this really beautiful time where we would, like, eat, for the first time, like, freely eat whatever we wanted to eat, and no one would be judged because it was just a bunch of fat people sitting around and literally eating our feelings (laughs).[80]

When she gave this anecdote during our interview, Arteaga smiled. She beamed. The laughter at the end of this statement is telling. The eating brought joy. The act of breaking bread built on the community ethos generated by the mutual experience of trauma in order to transform it into something else, something lighter (or, more accurately, something happier and heavier). Luna also spoke about the food with excitement in his interview,

> Oh my god, the fucking food! Like we ate so much. Eating in public is really political for me, so, like, being in a place where everybody wanted to eat a lot and it wasn't a big deal and it was encouraged and you just like ate the shit

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[79] In his essay, "Chatting Back an Epidemic," Lyndon Gill argues that relationships and intersubjectivities constitute a valid determination of a sacred domain. I reclaim and reconfigure the sacred in these ways with the help of Gill's work.

[80] Arteaga, interview.

> out of a lot of fucking food… it was just like so judgment free and like compassionate and I don't know… talking about it seems a little trivial but it was really powerful.[81]

Luna clarifies that not only is breaking bread with other fat people, eating freely with other fat people, a political act. His statement also demonstrates that the joy that arises out of such an experience is not trivial. That joy in eating, as well as the eating itself, cohere into a powerful political critique. I return to Audre Lorde for deeper understanding. I argue that, for these fat performers, eating among other fat people activates the erotic as "power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. " Furthermore, with regard to the structure of feeling surrounding rehearsal meals, "the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers."[82] For Lorde, these bridges not only bond individuals by exposing the depth of their similar feelings. These bridges also allow individuals to connect across difference. This is crucial to remember with regard to the *Fat* ensemble. They are, of course, all fat femme identified queers. However, they are each quite different in other ways and a holistic methodology of radical self-care must hold space for both those similarities and those differences.

The writing and the eating in *Fat: The Play's* rehearsal process extended, finally, into the process of staging the piece. If we understand the sharing of one's personal writing in the writing process, or the out loud speech and performance of that writing

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[81] Luna, interview.
[82] Lorde, *Erotic,* (1978).

once it has been turned into a script, as a kind of performance, we might also understand performing or devising in proximity to that speech as a kind of spectatorship. The performers in a process that deals specifically, explicitly, and almost pedagogically in sociopolitical themes and personal narrative might be better understood as spect-actors for one another's lives while in the rehearsal room.[83] In this way, the performance of the transcendent truth of fat queer femmeness might inspire, in the ensemble of spect-actors, a utopian performative which is necessarily always already a performative of sustenance insofar as it sustains, heals, creates community, and exists as a praxis within performance. The power of the performative of sustenance is amplified and extended temporally by writing and eating which, as in *Fat*'s rehearsal process, constitute Cvetkovich's utopia of ordinary habit as repeatable, everyday processes that sustain individuals through depression, sometimes literally. Althea Clemons speaks to the power of the rehearsal process and its performatives of sustenance:

> I have depression and I struggle with it a lot. It makes me more socially anxious. It makes me more unable to handle basic things like getting out of bed. Having rehearsals was really important to me because it was something I wanted to get out of bed for no matter what was going on, no matter how stressed out I was, no matter how terrible I felt about it. No matter how bad I felt about how my day was going, about how little I've accomplished, I was like 'I can go to rehearsal and get a lot done and be around people who still

[83] I borrow and adapt the idea of the spect-actor from Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985).

think that I look nice [even though they] know that all I've been doing all day is crying. And that's important.'[84]

For Clemons, the performative of sustenance operated quite literally as a means to sustain her through depression as both a clinical designation and as generated by capitalist white heteropatriarchy. For Arteaga, the rehearsal space was "a sanctuary" from capitalist white heteropatriarchal relationalities.[85] For Luna, the rehearsal process was a "bonding experience," "therapeutic," and previously "unimaginable."[86] Subtly parrhesiastic and totally constituted by performatives of sustenance, *Fat: The Play*'s rehearsal process rejuvenated and recuperated an ensemble of fat queer femmes (of color) and readied them to perform their truth to power, to force audiences to come face to face with fatness queer femme bodies, and complicity with sizeist capitalist white heteropatriarchy.

Performing Radical Self-Care

On February 7, 2014, I attended the premiere of *Fat: The Play* at the Hyde Park Theatre in Austin, Texas. The piece, as I've mentioned, was one piece in a series to be presented as a part of the short fringe FronteraFestival. An evening of FronteraFest short fringe typically lists five or six new pieces of theatre, each piece roughly twenty minutes in length. On the night of *Fat*'s premiere, the pieces were widely diverse. In addition to *Fat*, performances featured a shadow puppet show, two thin white women dancing a duet between emotion and logic, and four thin cis gender white men closing the evening with a session of improv that lasted too long. The diversity of the audience reflected the

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[84] Clemons, interview.
[85] Arteaga, interview.
[86] Luna, interview.

diversity of the pieces performed, meaning *Fat: The Play* would play to an audience that was equal parts support and surprise.

The piece features its six performers flirting, emoting, yelling, defying, politicizing, intimating, mocking, and self-loving; *Fat*'s primary thematic relationship is that of the fat queer to her/his own body. As such, each ensemble member gives a monologue, as her/himself, detailing their own insecurities and the psychological and affective paths they've taken to move beyond them. Nicole Arteaga, for instance, delivers a candid speech divulging the shame she has dealt with over her "protruding belly" and "brown nipples" as a fat queer woman of color. Throughout her text she brings her hands to her stomach and then to her breasts, to draw the audience's imaginative eye to the spaces of her body that she has previously avoided showing to others. She concludes her section with the following empowering proclamation: "I couldn't see my brownness for its beauty. I hadn't yet understood that in the brownness of my skin lived years and years of stories of people and our resistance, that it painted culture all over my body."[87]

In order to understand the effect of Arteaga's monologue, which explicitly brings the category of race into conversation with fatness, queerness, and femmeness, I turn to Rebecca Schneider's concept of 'the explicit body:'

> The explicit body in representation is foremost a site of social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality- all of which

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[87] *Fat: The Play*, by Nicole Arteaga, Erin Burrows, Althea Clemons, Caleb Luna, Danny Miller, and Jules Pashall, directed by Jules Pashall, Hyde Park Theatre, Austin, TX, February 7, 2014.

> bear ghosts of historical meaning, markings delineating social hierarchies of privilege and disprivilege.[88]

In the first place, I wish to establish Schneider's concept of the explicit body as corporeal parrhesia. By employing explicit body performance, the performer literally puts their body on the line in dangerous, frank, truthful, and critical ways. When such a corporeal and explicit intervention is situated in the political and arises from a personal sense of duty, the performer becomes parrhesiastes. Arteaga's monologue and each of the similarly structured subsequent monologues from the rest of the ensemble make their bodies explicit by exposing the ghosts of oppression that haunt their lives and by revealing the sociopolitical battles that are waged in, on, at, and because of their bodies. In this explicity, explication, and unfolding, the performers confront their audience and their own subjugation publicly, performatively, and directly. The entirety of *Fat: The Play*, then, is a parrhesiastic act.

Arteaga's monologue also serves as a case study of a performative of sustenance that circulates between, and thus connects, audience and spectator. Each of the interviews I conducted with the cast specifically cited an exchange between Arteaga and Morgan Collado, the fat trans Latina described as an ensemble member of *What's Goin' On?* in chapter one, sitting in the front row, as perhaps the most significant and memorable isolated instance of that evening's performance event. Arteaga extrapolates why this was the case for her:

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[88] Rebecca Schneider, *Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

> There were a few moments when I felt really intensely emotional. During my first monologue, I'm talking about being a kid, being fat and brown, and how my body was something that I absolutely hated and was disgusted by. I started speaking and, a few lines in, Morgan burst out in tears and it felt so necessary for her, another brown femme who identifies as fat. I just felt like there was this exchange of love and grief and healing between us.[89]

The deep recognition of one another that Arteaga describes, the deeply shared erotic feeling of mutual understanding, constructs an affective bridge between these two fat queer femme women of color. They are bonded in community by an exchange of love, grief, and healing. On some level, as well, this is a doubly experienced utopian performative insofar as both the performer and the audience member become spectators to the recognition of their own humanity by another individual of like mind and heart on a deep, honest, and utopian level. This moment also demonstrates that repeatable intimate, transformative contact with different audience members over the course of multiple performances could constitute an erotic utopia of ordinary habit for the performer. With that in mind, performing constitutes a performative of sustenance insofar as it qualifies as a sustained practice of utopian erotic subjectivity. I also argue that, though the performative of sustenance as a practice of sustainment exists only for the performer in this example because the audience member only experiences its effects in a single moment, the erotic generated from the performative of sustenance seeps into the

[89] Arteaga, interview.

audience, even if only to a singular audience member, similarly to the way in which the utopian performative conjures its joyous spectatorial feelings.

After each of the ensemble members give accounts, similarly personal to Arteaga's, at the intersections of their identitarian affects, the play assumes a confrontational, explicit, and parrhesiastic relationship with the audience. The following series of lines illuminates one of the play's most significant discursive and performatic contributions:

> Erin: We have been told our fucking is gross,
>
> Althea: disgusting,
>
> Dan: nasty,
>
> Caleb: revolting:
>
> Nicole: well it is revolting.
>
> Jules: This is a fucking revolt.
>
> All**:** Our fucking is revolutionary.[90]

Having already summoned their explicit bodies into literal, visceral, and corporeal presence through their various monologues, these lines, shared among each of the six performers, unify them and transform their play into a political movement. The lines deploy Schneider's notion of "binary terrorism- or strategic implosion of binaried distinctions."[91] Revolting, the single word, simultaneously establishes and collapses a corporeal binary. Fat becomes both an object of disgust and shame and a subject of

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[90] *Fat: The Play*.

[91] Schneider, *Explicit Body in Performance*, 18-19.

revolution. Further, the above lines indicate that, while others ascribe disgust and shame to them, this ensemble of fat bodies refuses that signification in favor of a radical politics that is always already enabled by and in their explicit bodies. This performative intervention turns objectification into fierce, empowered subjectivity and turns the audience into a mass of onlookers who must now take a side in the ongoing battle between sizeist capitalist white heteropatriarchy and liberatory justice.

The moment is compounded by the sensual bodily configuration that follows the lines. Textually, the revolt that the ensemble names is generated from the shame associated with 'fucking' (as) a fat person. The ensemble couples up, pushes their bodies to one another, and conjures three separate momentary queer sexual encounters as they verbally describe their fat sex. This staging of fat femme (mostly cisgender female) queers of multiple racial backgrounds is thus a staging of coalition amongst fatness and other axes of oppression; the company models what a coalitional fat revolution looks like: sexy, fat positive, queer, racially diverse, confrontational, femme, vulnerable, and inescapable.

It is also worth isolating the ensemble's femme identifications in order to attend to the ways that the fat revolution conjured by the piece queers, and therefore empowers intersectionally, the struggle against misogyny. By foregrounding femme identity in their revolting performance, *Fat: The Play* refuses misogyny perpetrated by all people in all spaces and communities. In other words, they acknowledge the way in which femininity is always subjugated to masculinity in capitalist white heteropatriarchal society even in spaces that consist solely of woman-identified individuals. Given this, the revolt

proposed by *Fat* is radically feminist where radical translates to a propensity for solidarity politics across identity, a refusal of misogyny in all of its manifestations, and a valuing of femininity in all of its manifestations.

This radical feminism is also radically queer in its non-masculinity. The piece values femme identity on its own standards and does not measure it against or juxtapose it with masculinity nearly at all: a revolutionary reframing of gender in its own right. As Luna points out in his interview: "femme for femme is really powerful and subversive. If there's no masculinity than people don't think its sex which is like not true and that can be extended into penis and other things."[92] Luna's recognition of the revolutionary potential of shameless sexuality in femme for femme sexual encounter, on top of the resistance of fat desexualization, on top of the representation of queer people of color in sexual pursuit of one another make the explicit corporeal nature of this moment parrhesiastic. In other words, the six bodies on stage perform a truth about the utopian quality of solidarity politics within queerness.

As I've already begun to suggest, the revolution proposed by *Fat: The Play* shimmers at the intersection of three key theoretical modes of queerness: radical self-care, utopia, and solidarity politics. For José Esteban Muñoz, queerness is an ideality and utopia is critical and educated. Queerness is not-yet-here, existing on the horizon. It is something to which we aspire because we do not have it in the present moment except in glimpses.[93] *Fat: The Play* is one of those glimpses of queer utopia that arises out of a

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92 Luna, interview.

93 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 2009.

solidarity politics developed by fierce analysis. The following passage of *Fat* performs this theory of queerness' utopian solidarity with fatness, race, and femme identity:

> Nicole: Sometimes, I envision my fatness as a thread:
>
> Caleb: a thread that is woven through me, through my history and my body, tied to my brownness, stitched to my femmeness, my queerness.
>
> Althea: When the thread is at it's thinnest, it seeks other loose threads to stitch itself to,
>
> Caleb: to weave itself into collective histories, communities of bodies and fatness,
>
> Nicole: tying itself to them, to their histories, their feelings, weaving together our stories and love and our power.
>
> Althea: This thread is strongest, most powerful when it meets other threads like it, woven into a tapestry, ornamented by our bodies,
>
> Caleb: our brownness,
>
> Nicole: our queerness,
>
> Caleb, Althea and Nicole: our resistance.[94]

These lines are spoken and performed with the queer people of color at the front of the stage and the white cast members supporting from behind them. The qpoc members of the cast hold hands to depict the thread's flow between and amongst their bodies. They tie their racial histories, fatness, queerness, feelings, love, femmeness, power, stories, and resistance together by linking their fingers and their sentences. The moment centers racial discourse and the concerns of people of color in the larger discussion of fatness. This

[94] *Fat: The Play*.

constitutes what I, drawing from Muñoz, wish to characterize as a critical queer utopian solidarity.

I wish to clarify, in an act of expansion, what I mean by queerness and solidarity in the context of radical self-care. I ascribe to Muñoz's idea of queerness, but I also attach valences, terms, and agendas grounded in liberatory idealism to the term. In what way does *Fat: The Play* (aspire to) configure queerness? What does it offer us? When I say queer, and when queerness is performed in *Fat: The Play*, it becomes a sociopolitical designation, even more than a purely sexual designation (though it must always be both). It comes to mean intersectional, weird, racialized, unconventional, inclusive, political, engaged, generous, compassionate, erotic, hilarious, fun, and diverse. This understanding of queer includes genderqueers, trans women, cisgender women, trans men, and all other gender non-conforming folks along with cisgender men. This queer includes the ugly, the magnificent, the disabled, and even more racial diversity.[95] This queer includes people who are way too gorgeous to be conventionally beautiful- fat people. This queerness does not force any of these identities apart, does not fall victim to the narrow impulses toward obfuscated identity politics implanted in us by neoliberal capitalism and white heteropatriarchy. Rather, queerness as exemplified in *Fat: The Play*, the kind of queerness on José Muñoz's horizon, only exists in personal and political togetherness, community, and solidarity.

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[95] I take the idea of embracing the ugly as magnificence in disability from Mia Mingus' essay here: Mia Mingus, "Moving Toward the Ugly: A Politic Beyond Desirability" from *Leaving Evidence* (blog), November 22, 2011, http://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/201 1/08/22/moving-toward-the-ugly-a-politic-beyond-desirability/.

Lastly, perhaps as a direct result of the radical parrhesia endemic to *Fat: The Play*'s explicit body politics and effervescent queerness, the feelings of tension among the audience that evening were palpable. On any given line the audible responses were mixed: a scoff to my left, uncomfortable laughter below me, compassionate and sympathetic tears from a mutual friend to my right, "YAS!" from the queer ally in the front row. The affect circulating in the space was mixed, at war, resisting and revolting simultaneously. I acknowledge this muddled affective circumstance and the reality of these disparate reactions in order to emphasize the following point: the explicit fat (queer femme [of color]) body is revolutionary and such a revolution is characterized by distinct, warring sides. Sizeist capitalist white heteropatriarchal affect pushes back against the resistance posed by the feeling of queer utopian solidarity. And yet, for the brief instances during which those two sides are gathered together in the theatrical response, this affective binary collapses. We are forced to share space and listen to mutual truth. We are forced to feel next to one another, which, as affect theory argues, is always already feeling *because of* one another.[96] We are faced with the subjectivity of elsewhere objects. We are confronted with our own explicit revolting impulses. We are confronted with choices: value fat queer femme (of color) bodies or devalue human beings; either revolt or be revolting, be a part of the revolutionary performance or fall with the outgoing ideological regime.

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96 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London: Routledge 2004).

The Limits of Radical Self-Care

As I move toward the end of this thesis, I wish to map the long road of possibility that stretches beyond the final pages of this text. In the first place, one task of this project has been to name specific and reproducible strategies in a larger holistic arsenal of radical self-care. These strategies may be performatives of sustenance, animative performance tactics of parrhesia, or a confluence of the two. They have included the process of the check-in, the arsenal of Viewpoints, the sharing of personal writing, the confrontational performance of poetry, confrontational monologue in theatrical performance, loud truth proclamations in official state spaces, recorded or broadcast use of the civil rights repertoire of protest, explicit body symbolism in performance, implicating the politic of the audience, breaking bread in ensemble, and simply allowing marginalized bodies to share physical and emotional space in order to relate to and perform their marginality. To be clear, cataloguing these strategies has not been the primary purpose of this study. Rather, this catalogue is the by-product of the case studies that I've used to develop this thesis' primary contribution: the praxis of radical self-care. As such, this list is not by any means exhaustive nor should these strategies be seen as the ideal models of performatives of sustenance or performed parrhesia. I submit these strategies as potentialities, options, and sanctuaries to which queer people of color may turn in moments of need. There is more excavating to be done with regard to tactics of survival that fall under the rubric of radical self-care and I invite others to join me in such excavation.

It is also crucial to understand that radical self-care is not a perfect theory or an all-purpose praxis, and, in a similar way, the scope of this document is rife with its own

limitations as well. My sample, for instance, focuses on Austin based artists exclusively which is mostly the result of my geographic location and travel limitations. While I do believe that the performative of sustenance, parrhesia, or radical self-care are generalizable theories and not necessarily particular to Austin, there is work to be done with regard to the ways that different contexts within the United States shape the nuances of radical self-care's politics.

Furthermore, throughout this thesis, there has been some slippage when invoking the primary beneficiary of radical self-care. As my title suggests, this project focuses primarily on the ways in which queer people of color can assume a practice of radical self-care in order to sustain themselves within and eventually dismantle capitalist white heteropatriarchy. Many times throughout this text, I use words that invoke populations beyond queer people of color like 'marginalized,' and 'minoritarian.' This is the result of the necessary limitations of space and time placed on this thesis project. The slippage indicated my desire, with more time and more space, to have theorized radical self-care as it pertains to the totality of the most marginalized among us: the disabled, the fat, the gender non-conforming, the poor, the punks, the bulldaggers, and the welfare queens.[97] I do believe that radical self-care can benefit such a diversity of disenfranchised populations even as it stems from queer and queer of color roots almost exclusively. I leave it to other scholars, and perhaps my own future endeavors, to theorize radical self-care more broadly.

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[97] I gesture here, again, to the solidarity politics of Cathy Cohen's work.

It is also true throughout this thesis, in my descriptions of both *What's Goin' On?* and *Fat: the Play*, that I have underwritten and somewhat invisibilized the contributions of white, often female or femme identified, queers. On one hand, I regret that this is the consequence of centering and privileging the voices and experiences of queers of color in this document. On another hand, I write this document in response to the myriad instances in which white queer experience has privileged itself as a means of invisibilizing qpoc contributions to history. This is not an eye for an eye. It is, instead, a recuperation, a reclamation, and a rehabilitation. I wish to name Wendy Vastine, Erin Burrows, Danny Miller, and Jules Pashall as four brilliant white queers whose contributions to the pieces at the center of this project are immeasurable but whose voices and experiences are ultimately not the province of this thesis.

It is possible that radical self-care requires a certain threshold of resources and an absolute minimum of privilege and power in order to be performed. In Sabat's case in chapter two, she needed to be able to afford being thrown into jail as a result of her use of parrhesia. A poor qpoc may need to work too many jobs to be able to organize or make art, they may lack the necessary transportation to participate in the performatives of sustenance being offered by their community. I have two responses to these limitations. The first is obvious: when survival moves beyond an affective register into the immediacy of literal and corporeal life and death, radical self-care, though noble, may become a flawed and impossible endeavor.

However, my second response flips this harsh reality and suggests that this is precisely the reason for embracing radical self-care for those with the power and

resources to do so. We must first do our utmost to ensure accessibility of our rehearsal, activist, and our organizing spaces to the disabled, poor, and most disenfranchised among us. Accessibility should never be tacked on, never a gimmick, never a benevolent effort for which we pat ourselves on the back. Radical self-care, in its ideal state, implies accessibility, does not take accessibility for granted, and recognizes that accessibility as it pertains to the needs of the larger community must be seen as all or nothing, a total necessity. Any radical coalition is incomplete and weaker without disabled, poor, or other othered voices in the room. However, in the instances in which accessibility is rendered absolutely impossible for any number of reasons- radical self-care becomes a means of working towards that accessibility. Radical self-care bucks against neoliberal capitalist disenfranchisement by uniting the affective and political consciousnesses of those in close proximity to its use. Radical self-care is always already attempting to dismantle capitalist white heteropatriarchy and, as such, is always already an attempt to make accessibility possible for our most marginalized community members.

A certain reading of *Radical Self-Care* might argue that radical self-care resigns itself to the terms of capitalist white heteropatriarchy and fails to dream of an alternative. Rather than refute this critique, I critically embrace it. True, radical self-care names the typical audiences, recognizes its opposition, and opposes in turn. Parrhesia, after all, requires an interlocutor. Theatre requires an audience in order to be theatre. Activism requires a cause, a space to occupy with a sit-in. The activist endeavors of recent history that have attempted to shirk the terms of engagement with dominant systems in order to create anti-systems have still, by physical necessity, pointed to social ills, corporations,

and policies- each attached to human bodies in some way- in order to make their critical interventions. Consider the anti-structure of the occupy movement. For all of their refusal and queer failure, the one percent still emerged as the movement's most enduring figure and we are left with the charge of dismantling neoliberal capitalism because the wealth is in the hands of the very few.[98] We have not fully escaped the system. The intervention into white heteropatriarchal capitalism implied by the community building and parrhesiastic impulses of radical self-care is meant to raise consciousness, to revolt, to recuperate the commons as a space for all of us. It surpasses the bounds of liberal protest because it proceeds with an analysis that refuses liberal assimilation and respectability politics. Radical self-care aspires to open the potentiality implicit in cloisters of erotic community and queer counterpublics for the totality of society (if society will still be a useful concept at that point). I fear that this aspiration is as far off as Muñoz's capitulation of queerness, but the critical affect of hope grabs me by the hand and we skip toward the horizon.

Conclusion

One of the projects of this thesis has been to blur the lines between theatrical performance and activism with regard to radical self-care. That is, radical self-care necessitates that performance become activism and that activism embrace performance. The performative of sustenance, though primarily theorized within the contexts of rehearsal space, is just as present in the space of community and activist organizing.

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[98] Here I invoke Jack Halberstam's work on the refusal of capitalist paradigms in *The Queer Art of Failure*.

Parrhesia, to varying degrees, exists in the rehearsal room and on stages. This is especially true for performances engaged in explicit, sociopolitical analysis. Radical self-care is a methodology of survival through activist performance for those of us on the margins of society. Such a methodology leads us to the following supposition, one that this author believes necessary and crucial: any good critical performance praxis is also necessarily a critical activist praxis, for it is only when performance acts as a weapon and a prayer toward the dismantling of capitalist white heteropatriarchy that every one us may be free to survive, to live, to thrive, and to love. Performance is only truly good if it is also revolting.

Such a premise raises the question from which radical self-care emerges in the first place: how do we, as queer people of color, sustain ourselves in a capitalist white heteropatriarchal world? While the whole of this document has responded directly to that question, I conclude my discussion of the topic by turning to queer Sri Lankan artivist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha who writes that there is a need for "organized resistance- a kind that is sustainable, caring, open to listening, and created with our needs in the center- not some other model that doesn't work."[99] Piepzna-Samarasinha writes in the post 9-11 moment when her brown body and the bodies of those she loves are threatened by heightened discrimination in Canada and the United States. She writes of her exhaustion with mainstream activism and the inability of allies to address the concerns of those most endangered by the state and the dominant culture. She explains

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[99] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha,*We Don't Need Another Wave: Dispatches from the Next Generation of Feminists* (Berkeley: Seal P, 2006), 175-176.

that she needed to step back from activism in order to take care of herself and the people she loved. She reframes that moment of stepping back by arguing that to step back is not disengagement but, rather, moving back toward self-care is a form of activism in itself.

In this way Piepzna-Samarasinha invokes the Audre Lorde quote that sits at the heart of this project, the foundation in which my ideas are humbly rooted. To reiterate, Lorde writes "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." Let's not get it twisted, the idea that it might be considered an inappropriate and useless disengagement from activism to retreat from the streets or the battlefield to the kitchen, a stoop, the bedroom, the theatre, the couch, or the rehearsal room in order to sustain oneself is, bluntly, absolutely wrong. To be quite clear, I develop the idea of radical self-care not as a prescription for revolution but as a revolutionary possibility, one among many.

I develop radical self-care partly because I believe in the tender work of sustainment, the erotic work of community building, and the radical work of performing truth to power. I write in response to mainstream forms of radical activism, the sort that Piepzna-Samarisinha criticizes for their unsustainability and failure to account for those most marginalized and vulnerable among us. I write in response to mainstream (often white middle class but certainly not always) conceptions of self-care: yoga, the self-help book, eating healthier, exercise, sleeping well, spa treatments, daily mantras, knitting, ice cream gorging, Netflix binge watching, Tumblr ranting, and the list goes on. These are

all (mostly)[100] valid methods of sustaining oneself; a person should be able to ensure their survival and attempt to thrive in whatever ways necessary so long as they don't harm anyone else.

But I want more from self-care, radically more. I want community, I want intervention, I want sustenance, and I want revolution. I want a holistic methodology. I want to believe that this is what we all want. I quote Piepzna-Samarisinha again, this time at some length:

> The only activism I am interested in is the type that sees all the different ways we resist as legitimate because they change ourselves and the world. We also need to find ways to create big, macro organizing projects that are antiburnout [sic] and sustainable over the long haul…We need movements that acknowledge that our feelings are not distractions from the struggle, but that they are damn well why we start or stop struggling in the first place…to have emotion and action wedded as part of one movement.[101]

Radical self-care actualizes these sentiments. By accounting for the indirectness of emotion and the directness of action, radical self-care emerges as a holistic methodology of both self-care and radical activism. In fact, it refuses the binary between self-care and radical activism altogether- merging the two into a singular, inextricable, performative practice. Through its activation of the erotic in the performative of sustenance and its parrhesiastic propensity for performing truth to power, radical self-care gives us, as queer

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[100] As a caveat, many of these practices are bound up in cultural misappropriation, yoga especially, and certainly all of them are bound up in capitalism.

[101] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarisinha, *We Don't Need Another Wave,* 178.

people of color, the sustenance we need to survive and the tools we need to resist capitalist white heteropatriarchy. Radical self-care, therefore, is a liberatory praxis with the potential to allow queer people of color to thrive amongst each other and the rest of the world, dancing utopic and singing the essence erotic, performing truth to power to beauty to love.

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