

Practicing Community:  
Examining and Reimagining  
Community-based Performance Practice  
in Williamstown.

By

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This thesis is dedicated to my boys Miles and Cailean,  
and to my parents, without their love and support none of this would be possible.

And to Allison Orr. I cannot imagine a better artistic partner.

Special thanks to Emily for introducing me to Allison and  
helping me explore my original ideas that would become *Served*.

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## Abstract

This thesis will examine historical and contemporary trends along with major community arts practices as a strategic investigation towards the creation of an artist-lead, movement-based project called *Served* to be developed in close connection with the students, faculty, and staff of Williams College. It will survey of community-based projects in Williamstown and the surrounding community as a springboard for an analysis of the major trends in community arts practice, contextualizing the project of this thesis within a larger history of community arts practice as well as demonstrating why this project is right for this community. The first chapter will review the historical context for the divide between what is considered, in this country, traditional the performing arts and community-based performance. The second chapter will detail the project and profile the artist collaborator, Allison Orr. Next, in chapter three, I will discuss contemporary social trends making the argument why community-based performance is important now. In chapter four I will review in detail the culminating element of the *Served* project, the toolkit, making the argument for the need to reimagine community-based practice, and collaboration, on college and university campuses.

## Introduction

Jan Cohen-Cruz, in her seminal work *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*, speaks about community arts practice as not only an act of building community but equally about "expressing it" (100). These notions of building and expressing community, along with the more fundamental question "What is community?" are inspirational starting points for this thesis and its resulting project, which attempts to respond to these ideas within the Williamstown community. This thesis will examine historical and contemporary trends in the performing arts along with major community arts practices as part of an effort towards the creation of an artist-led, movement-based project called *Served*. It will be developed in close connection with the students, faculty, and staff of Williams College.

*Served* is a tailor-made project designed in close collaboration between choreographer Allison Orr and myself, as the producer. *Served*, which will be outlined in more detail in chapter two, is an artist and community partnership initiative for college food service workers and the students they serve. There are two communities being brought together for this socially engaged arts project: locally based food service workers and the student population of Williams College. *Served* has three components. The first, the performance component, will be performed on the Williams campus in the fall of 2017. The second component creates a touring model so that *Served* can be presented on other campuses. The final component, the toolkit, creates a framework for community-based projects, like *Served*, to be created on college and university campuses. The toolkit will be examined in detail in chapter four. Starting from Orr's practice, the three component parts of the project were formulated to address three separate constituent needs: First, the need

to have a community wide dialogue around issues of class and privilege, needs that have been explicitly expressed as pressing by the Williams' community on all levels. Second, to support Forklift Danceworks by creating a touring business model. Third, to respond to the need expressed by partner college/university presenters across the country for a framework to engage in this type of community-based practice within an academic setting.

It is likely immediately apparent, this is an unconventional partnership. A more traditional process for the creation of a performance work would have the original inspiration come from an artist. This thesis will show that the inspiration for community-based performance necessarily originates from the community's needs, and then, flowing out to how to express those needs. This type of work demands deep discourse between all involved if it is to have resonance and result in a product that is respectful to that community. This is the model for *Served* and my role as producer and co-creator is to facilitate and drive this process. The particular needs of the Williams community as well as the means of identifying them will be discussed in chapter two. Responding to those needs, as a community member, I reached out to Allison Orr to help create a method to invite the conversation. Steve Klass, Vice President for Campus Life, joined on as a project partner, and through our many conversations *Served* was conceived.

The implicit question is why this project, at this time, with these people? While by definition, a community-based practice requires that a work originates from within a community, these original collaboration meetings are the necessarily ordered preliminary steps for building a project within an institution. Here at Williams, they help to establish a foothold for *Served* within the college's hierarchy, and open the way for conversation and collaboration. The first seeds of this project started with one community member: me.

From my first days at Williams I noticed a clear class structure: faculty, then senior administrators, alumni, students, salaried staff, and finally the hourly staff. Being in an unusual position that sometimes crosses these groups, I became aware of how differently they are treated, and it inspired me to wonder about how the members of these latter groups experienced that difference. Over time, I started talking to members of the hourly staff about whether and how they experienced the class structure, and their stories painted a picture that reflected a wide range of emotions.

As a whole there were stories of frustration, even anger, repeated over and over. "Oh yeah, we're sludge here!" was the colorful, albeit typical, response I received when one staff member was asked directly if they felt there were class distinctions on campus (Anon. Food Service 1). These comments started me wondering how I could use my role as a curator to foster a response. Using the performing arts is a powerful means for direct response to political or social concerns. It has been part of my practice over the last eight years, and has been reflected in many of the projects I have worked on. One prominent example is the on-going three-year Mellon supported Choreographer-in-Residences with Ronald K. Brown and Emily Johnson examining issues of spirituality and food safety, respectively, through community-based dance projects.

Building off of these experiences I volunteered for the Claiming Williams programming committee. This committee, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter two, is charged by the college to formally examine and respond to issues of inequity, privilege, race, and sexism on campus. The committee gets its name from its founding charge to "invite the community to acknowledge and understand the uncomfortable reality that not all students, staff, and faculty can equally 'claim' Williams" ("Mission & History").

Through the work on this committee I learned of the college's interest in story telling with various parts of the community, and through my conversations with Steve Klass, came to focus on the food service workers whose many stories I had been hearing. While on one level this thesis is a curatorial rationale for *Served*, it is also, much more personally, a very direct way to create an artistic vehicle to give voice to all those stories.

This thesis, using *Served* as a springboard, will also examine the major trends in community arts practice, contextualizing this project within a larger history of community arts practice as well as demonstrating why this project is right for this community. In the first chapter I will review the historical context for the divide between what is considered, in this country, the performing arts and community-based performance. The second chapter will detail the project. Next, in chapter three, I will discuss contemporary social trends making the argument why community-based performance is important now. In chapter four I will review in detail the culminating component of the *Served* project, the toolkit, making the argument for the need to reimagine community-based practice, and collaboration, on college and university campuses.

This introduction will offer a brief cultural context to set the stage for this project as well as define the community in which this project is designed to address. Finally, a select list of terms will be offered to set a baseline of understanding of the most often used terms in this field.

"We danced the 'W' right off the floor!" commented Sandra Burton when reflecting on the success of one of her community-based dance projects (Interview). In many ways, the mid-1990s was a high-water mark for community arts projects in the northern



Berkshires in recent decades. Sandra L. Burton, the Lipp Family chair of the Williams College Dance Department, arrived in Williamstown in 1983. First as an artist on tour, then as a visiting solo artist, and finally as a full-time member of the faculty, she was determined from the very start to expand her educational mandate to include more than just the privileged few in possession of a Williams ID card. From the very beginning Burton made the intersection of dance and community development a priority. For Burton the two are inseparable.

There has been no lack of effort to bring community members together in the northern Berkshires by using the common affinities created by schools, religious organizations, arts institutions, and individual artists. In the past year, we have seen the founding of a "Makerspace," the North Adams Makers' Mill, the creation of Common Folk, a community-based collaborative art-making organization, and the re-energizing of Gallery 51, a small, progressive gallery presenting local artists on Main Street in North Adams.

There has been no serious effort, however, to capitalize on this community building as a vehicle for the expression of values in a way that would speak to Cohen-Cruz's second point about expressing community (100). The question remains, how do we develop an arts practice as a catalyst to create social dialogue and civic action in our community?

Burton's work at Williams has set the precedent as well as laid the foundation for a community-based practice both on campus and in the surrounding community. Her work, as a matter of course, always included students alongside community members. Burton, whose efforts have always been rooted in bringing disparate groups of people together to form new communities, began her work at Williams simply as a way to more deeply explore connections between the students and surrounding communities, and subsequent

conversations such connections created; it quickly morphed into something much richer. Her work found common space for both student and community performers of all abilities as well as movement traditions from cultures all over the world. The need that Burton identified was straightforward: find a safe, creatively oriented activity for young people and their families to do during the long, usually hard, winters in the predominantly rural communities that make up and surround the northern Berkshires. Burton's first decade was a period of deep economic crisis, as the larger neighboring town of North Adams had just suffered the devastating loss of its primary employer, Sprague Electronics<sup>1</sup>, and was experiencing skyrocketing crime rates<sup>2</sup>.

Burton's particular journey started with an artist looking at her local community, Williamstown and North Adams, and identifying a need. She started responding to that need by creating a connection and mutual conversation through the process of creating dance. Burton cites the culmination of these decades of community-based practice with the creation of the Berkshires based Lift Ev'ry Voice. Its mission states that Lift Ev'ry Voice "Celebrat[es] African-American Culture & Heritage in the Berkshires...celebrating the rich traditions of African-American community, arts and culture, history and heritage found within Berkshire County and across the nation" ("About"). True to her form, Lift Ev'ry Voice relies on crossing generational, racial, geographic, and even political boundaries as a wellspring of vibrant and relevant programming (Burton Interview). If there are two disparate groups, Burton will find a way to bring them together through the arts.

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<sup>1</sup> At its height, Sprague employed 4,000 workers in North Adams alone ("Vishay"). The town of North Adams, at the time of the final plant shutdown in 1985 had less than 18,000 residents ("1980 Census"). Mass MoCA would eventually take residence in Sprague's Marshall Street plant.

<sup>2</sup> From 1985 to 1995 the reported violent crime rate in North Adams jumped 192% ("Crime").

Through her practice of community building she helped build the support base that would directly lead to the building of the '62 Center for Theatre and Dance (CTD) at Williams in 2005. For many, the creation of the CTD is the storybook ending capping decades of work by Burton and others. For many others who are directly served by the outreach, however, this creation is seen as a kind of failure, or at the very least a significant step in the wrong direction by one of the community's most engaged activists. At first glance this may seem counter-intuitive: a multi-million dollar arts facility committed to theater and dance should seem like the pinnacle of success. A building, however, by virtue of its physicality, is limited by its design and mission. Burton, ever the artistic opportunist, in contrast, was creating community wherever and whenever she was able. With a building came walls, schedules, and expectations. Put another way, the community now needed to come to the CTD, instead of Burton going out to create and develop community where it is located, therefore where it is most needed.

It is far too early to start writing the epilogue for Burton's work or the CTD, as both stories are still being written. The tension between these two perspectives, however, offers a point of cultural reflection for this community. How can the arts respond to needs in the community? For some, the answer is to create an institution, a permanent space committed to the presentation for the performing arts. For others, it is to dig deeper into the community. In chapter three, using this tension as a framework, this thesis will argue that the traditional response (the former) can no longer fully meet the evolving needs of communities thus requiring a greater degree of focus on the latter.

The active programming at the CTD (there are over 60 different events open to the public during the non-summer months season) demonstrates a strong community response but, as will be shown, a traditional performance does not meet all of the community's need. Burton's work, understanding this tension, set the stage for a large-scale artist-led community engagement project in the northern Berkshires outside traditional performance spaces. *Served* will be in contrast to the decades-long engagement Burton established by only lasting for two years, but it will flow directly from the spirit of her efforts by engaging students, community members, and artists. Whereas Burton was seeking to bring communities together, *Served* will build on that tradition by bringing communities together as a means to then examine issues of class and privilege.

Williamstown is situated on the northern border of Berkshire County, which in turn is the western-most border in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Berkshires is a region that thrives off its well-deserved reputation of providing "world-class culture" offering the "hottest new" theater, dance, and galleries ("Arts & Culture in the Berkshires"). While this fact, in and of itself may be true, the Berkshires, especially the northern Berkshires, is a relatively isolated and rural community. The aforementioned cultural offerings and reputation mostly happen during the summer tourist season. By contrast *Served* is designed for the off-season, for the residents. The two anchor towns in the northern part of the county are Williamstown and North Adams. The contrast between Williamstown and the surrounding region is stark, thanks to Williams College in the former. In May of 2015 *The New York Times* published a county level examination of the "Best and Worst Places to Grow Up" in the United States. While the Berkshires is not at the bottom, the paper of record does not pull its punches: "Berkshire County is pretty bad for

income mobility for children in poor families" (Leonhardt). A second observation comes from *The Boston Globe* in May of 2014 highlighting the "Fastest Growing—and Fastest Shrinking—Towns and Cities" in the state. *All* ten cities on the fastest shrinking list are located in Berkshire County (Vaccaro). Topping the list is arguably the most affluent, most culturally rich town in the county: Williamstown.

North Adams, by contrast, is more typical of the region's profile in terms of social, economic, and demographics. It is the second fastest shrinking town in the state. While North Adams should be a hub of economic activity and gentrification with the founding of wildly successful Mass MoCA in 1999, according to the website USA City Facts the North Adams' "poverty rate of 14.3 percent is higher than the national average" ("North Adams, MA").

Williamstown and North Adams can be considered representative of the two communities at the heart of *Served*. 76 percent of the Williams College food service workers live in North Adams and its adjoining towns, save Williamstown. The median salary and age of the Williams food service workers is \$36,500 and 52, respectively (Rand). The Williams student body of 2,099, on the other hand, is significantly more diverse than the town they reside in for four to five years (and to which many return to raise families or retire). The college attracts students from across the country and world (the current student body has students from 89 different countries (Student Profile)). A full 50 percent of the student body receives financial aid. 16 percent of those receive 100 percent financial aid. The financial and cultural diversity of this student community for *Served* belies the inherent privilege that attends graduating from the top ranked liberal arts college in the United

States. The members of this latter community are, literally and figuratively, going places out of the reach of the former community.

Now that the foundation of the project, the inspiration, and the community the project is attempting to serve have been identified, we need to set an additional foundation, terminology. The more a field develops, the more specialized the language becomes as a result, mirroring its complexity and nuance. The language matures, in step with its parenting field. The performing arts are a leading example of a field whose arcane terminology has accumulated over thousands of years. The subsection of community arts performance as a documented practice in the United States, however, does not have the advantage of this history and subsequently lacks this kind of defined terminology.

Given that the field of community arts is not a deeply rooted form—it was born in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a response to artists and movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s— a clearer understanding of terms is needed. However, given that this thesis does not intend to be a comprehensive history of the practice, the selection of terms presented here is limited to those needed for a clear understanding of this effort. While this list may not be comprehensive it is extensive enough to suggest the many ways artists approach socially engaged arts work.

### Terminology:

**Arts-Centered Project:** Community arts activity in which a work of art is utilized to address a community need (e.g. a production of *West Side Story* through which issues of immigration are examined). Arts-centered projects are often developed by established arts organizations by taking existing work and using it as the

centerpiece of a community arts project. Alternatively, the organization can commission (or an individual artist can create) a work that in itself may not be primarily "about" an issue but in the context of its presentation can address it (Borwick "Building Communities" 14).

**Community Arts:** Arts-based projects/programming intentionally designed to address community issues (Borwick "Building Communities" 14).

**Community Arts Practice:** There are two important aspects to community arts practice. First is the belief that cultural meaning, expressions, and creativity reside within the community and, that the community artist's task is to assist people in freeing their imaginations and giving form to their creativity. The second is collaboration between artists and others is central and necessary to the practice of community arts. This is in contrast to the establishment arts idea that the nonartists' role is simply to form the audience for the work of professional artists; and also in contrast to the old-Left idea that socially conscious artists "speak for" the people who are incapable of speaking for themselves, channeling working peoples' rage and hope into proper artistic form (Goldbard).

**Community-Based Performance:** A local act in two senses: a social doing in one's particular corner of the world and an artistic forming of that doing for others to appreciate (Cruz "Local Acts" 13).

**Community Engagement:** a process whereby institutions enter into mutually beneficial relationships with organizations, informal community groups, or individuals. This normally implies arts organizations developing relationships outside of the arts community (Borwick "Building Communities" 14).

Socially Engaged Art: a process whereby art functions by attaching itself to subjects and problems that normally belong to other disciplines moving them temporarily into a space of ambiguity. It is this temporary snatching away of subjects into the realm of art-making that brings new insights to a particular problem or condition and makes it visible to other disciplines (Helguera 5).<sup>3</sup>

The key term most often used in this thesis is Community. It is the most ambiguous term and thus requires a more detailed discussion. In a broader context it is a term that is loaded with considerable nuance with its make-up changing considerably based on perspective. Jan Cohen-Cruz warns that attempting to form a fixed notion of community is a "dangerous undertaking; many identity categories that are treated like fixed, biologically determined entities are, in fact cultural" ("Local Acts" 3). An example of this is race. While race may be a "biologically insignificant issue of skin pigmentation...because of race's political role in history, it must be contended with and is quite significant in people's lives" ("Local Acts" 3). Cohen-Cruz's reflection on race is valuable because it highlights how challenging identifying a community can be. Perspective matters here. What may seem important from an outside perspective may have very different resonances from within the community. This underscores the critical importance of deep and extensive conversation with community members. For the purpose of this thesis I shall borrow from Alternate ROOTS' definition of the term. Alternate ROOTS is a regional arts service organization committed to supporting "the creation and presentation of original art that is rooted in community, place, tradition or spirit" ("What Is ROOTS?"). For Alternate ROOTS,

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<sup>3</sup> An excellent example of socially engaged art is Paul Chan's 2007 *Waiting for Godot* performed in two locations in New Orleans devastated by Hurricane Katrina. This production along with the accompanying community engagement gave voice to a community's anger over the government's inept response to the storm and its aftermath.



community is the commonplace, tradition, or spirit that binds a group. As *Served* the project is developed, a much more sophisticated notion of community will be created.

The final idea that needs addressing in this terminology section is the notion of the "fourth wall" as it symbolizes the separation between audience and the performer (discussed in more detail in the next chapter). Doug Borwick in *Building Communities, Not Audiences: The Future of the Arts in the United States* reminds us that "all art is an expression of its culture. The history of much artistic expression worldwide is participatory, inclusive, and community-based" (16). While this rightly implies a long and deep tradition, this notion of inclusivity is in contrast to current dominant culture in the United States which is based on a Western European orientation. "Western European [art] places a barrier between the artist and perceiver, [it] tends to be more exclusive and focuses on individual more than community" (16). So entrenched is this notion of a barrier that there is, in fact, a term for it: the "fourth wall." If the sides and back walls are the first three walls in a performance space, the fourth wall is the theatrical convention whereby a separation or wall is created between the performance and the audience. This wall allows for an emotional remove from the action onstage. We, the audience, are passive spectators, not accomplices in the action.

Community arts practice, by its very nature, gives space to the concerns most pressing to the communities involved. Moving beyond the fourth wall, the vision of *Served* is to create a viable framework for disparate communities to come together through an artist-led community arts practice. This would offer the community an intimate connection to the creation and performance of the work. At Williams, concerns around class and privilege on campus are at the heart of creating the performance component of the project.

While the project is by design anchored on the Williams campus, the non-performance components will reach well beyond the campus borders. This intentional juxtaposition of communities speaks to the origins and development of the socially engaged arts practice. As I will examine in the next chapter, this practice was created in response to the "fourth wall" perspective of the arts prior to the 1960s. Starting with an artistic rejection of the traditional, presentational performance aesthetic, fueled by a cultural diversity, and less Euro-centric, socially engaged arts practice attempts to reimagine how arts can participate in this country's cultural dialogue.

## Chapter 1 - Historical Perspective

*It has become remarkably apparent, during the last few years, that one of the best modes of driving out low tastes in the masses is to introduce higher.*

-Charles Loring Brace, 1872 (68)

In *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music: Act I (1776-1806)*, performance artist and inveterate cultural commentator Taylor Mac wryly observes that, "In America they like to start culture off with fear." His comment may have been directed towards the legal requirement to point out the emergency exits in case of fire; the joke is amusing because of its resonance. Why is culture, specifically art, which is ultimately an expression (amongst many other things) of ideas, creativity, beauty, and humanity, underpinned with a sense of fear? Mac's notion of the fear of cultures, specifically diverse cultures can be seen most clearly in the "culture wars" which erupted in the art world of the late 1980s with the "NEA Four"<sup>4</sup> and continues in various iterations to this day. James Davidson Hunter offers one commentary for this fear in the subtitle of his 1992 text *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. In others words, who gets to define America? Upon reflection, it is not surprising that a clash of cultures is part of the fabric of this country. This is a country founded by immigrants from many different cultures. Our cultural mythology holds that these people came "seeking liberty" or "freedom from oppression" while "looking for the land of opportunity." While mass migrations are always based on a need for a better life, such as for jobs during the industrial revolution, or survival, as during the Irish migrations in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a new a new beginning there comes the desire for building a

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<sup>4</sup>The NEA Four, Tim Miller, Holly Hughes, John Fleck, and Karen Finley, were artists denied NEA funding in 1990 for failing a Congress enacted "decency clause" as a form of artistic evaluation (Clements).

solid foundation. One of the ways of doing this is through cultural identity. It is inevitable, therefore, that as these new cultures with different perspectives assert themselves their diverse ideas rub against each other.

This chapter will examine how the broad trends of the great immigrations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, predominantly European in its early years, led to cultural norms which still resonate through our performing arts cultural experience (Levine 2). An attempt to control the more recent immigrants through culture created elitist stratifications such as "high" and "low," labels that are still used in many segments of society. These efforts came to dominate society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with large-scale immigrations such as the Irish migration due to the Great Potato Famine from 1845 to 1849. Many aspects of this cultural stratification remained in place for more than a century. I will examine how artists began to question these structures in the 1950s and 1960s, exploring new ways to produce as well as engage with the performing arts. These efforts continued into the 1970s until, as some argue, they collapsed in on themselves. Finally, I will discuss how these perspectives are in part being reimagined through community arts practice.

With the recent centenary celebrations of the premiere of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*) in 1913, much has been made of the opening night's riots. It is almost unimaginable that such an outburst, a deadly outburst of passion, could happen in this country in reaction to a performance. It did. In 1849 the "Astor Place Riot" (in New York City) led to at least 22 deaths. The tensions were ostensibly fueled by a patriotic rivalry between American actor Edwin Forrest and his English rival, William Macready, both renowned Shakespearean actors. The example of these riots underscores the passion with which communities hold culture as a form of expression and self-identity. It is easy

from this remove to dismiss *Sacre* as just another dance, or to wonder why anyone would really care who is the more prominent Shakespearean actor. As Cohen-Cruz warns with race (page 10) it is critical to understand and identify the important touchstones to a community. While, on the surface, the introduction of new dance movements and musical phrasing or supporting an actor were the issues that sparked these passions, there was a subtext to the Astor Place riot that added fuel to this fire. In particular to this case it was the attempts to restrict, and thereby control culture through the incorporation of "pricing policies and dress codes that excluded most of the theatregoing public" (McConachie).

The rise of industrialization in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century fueled internal migrations to the cities and factory towns. Ulrich Beck reminds us that Alexis de Tocqueville once famously observed in the 1830s the heterogeneity of the young country, as it started to change in earnest with the new internal and external migrations, creating cultural clashes (177). Feeling these shifts most acutely, or more precisely most threateningly, were the upper classes. Violent clashes were commonplace. The July 1863 Draft Riots, as just one example, left New York City in a state of chaos and anarchy for three days. Levine's argument is that the upper classes felt physically unsafe because of the new immigrants. Understanding the power of culture through the arts, they attempted to systematically control access to the arts as a means of controlling the immigrants. If they were controlled then order and safety would be restored. Aiding in this effort, the arts (as a form of cultural expression) were also a way to "make it possible to identify, distinguish, and order this new universe of strangers" (Levine 177). Tocqueville's vision of a shared culture was subsequently methodically and systematically broken into "discrete cultures", which, in turn, began the cultural polarizations euphemistically called "high" or "highbrow"

in contrast to "low" or "lowbrow" (Levine 207). It will be helpful to highlight some of Levine's key points from his book *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* to set the stage for the culture revolution of the late 1950s and 1960s.

The intellectual underpinning for the creation of a class divide, albeit a highly self-serving one, articulated that culture was a "refuge from the turmoil" of the period, from the "alienation," as well as respite from the unrelenting "marketplace." Culture had the power to "enable, elevate, [and] purify." It followed therefore that "without order there could be no pure culture, it was equally true that without culture there could be no meaningful order" (Levine 206). By this argument, if Orwell's *1984* gives us a glimpse of ultimate order, it must also show us ultimate culture. Clearly, this is not the case, at least in terms of culture. Culture, and by extension the performing arts, receives its vitality from the very interweaving of ideas and perspectives that, during this period, was an anathema to the upper classes.

Before we can shift this examination forward to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a few final residues of 19<sup>th</sup> century America should be highlighted. Another change during this time, notes historian Charles Lash, was the rise of the professional class which, in turn, "reduc[ed] the layman to incompetence." Levine parallels this shift to the rise of an arbiter of culture, the expert (Levine 211). Conductors and professional orchestras were on the vanguard of these efforts, as were theater owners with the introduction of intermissions along with turning down the audience lights in order to minimize talking (Levine 189-190). Newspapers were also conscripted in the cultural domestication. *The New York Times*, in a January 1908 editorial, not only castigates audience members for talking or leaving early,

but also asks the question, "Has any sufferer noticed that these folks are generally the least tastefully dressed and worst-looking folks in the audience?" ("Selfish Operagoers").

If the ultimate goal of the upper classes was to create order, this effort reached its apex in the 1950s. While America may have been quickly entering the atomic and space ages, this period is noted for its high degree of social and cultural conformity. One powerful symbol of this period was the creation of prefabricated homes, the first being Levittown. When Bill Levitt's homes first went on sale on Long Island New York in 1949 thousands of couples, in response to the post-war housing crisis, had lined up to purchase a home. Historian William Manchester, reflecting on Levittown observed, "everything was uniform" (431). Just as Fredrick Law Olmsted a century prior wanted to create an ordered world for the masses through public spaces like New York's Central Park, Levitt's creations came to symbolize conformity. As order was attempted through strict social norms—Levittown was not open to minorities—the same could be seen in art. Manchester, speaking of the newly introduced, wildly popular paint-by-numbers, offers a colorful observation that speaks to the artistic conformity of mainstream culture in the 1950s by noting, "there is nothing unfathomable about enumerated art. It was a kind of crib for the inartistic, allowing them to pass themselves off as painters without creating anything. In a decade remarkable for its high incidence of sham, it served as a cultural weathercock" (645).

Thoughtful examinations of the shifting cultural undertones in the 1950s that subsequently started to break into the open by the early 1960s are plentiful. The fault lines, in reflection, were plentiful ranging from visual artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso (on the cover of Time Magazine as early as 1939), and Jackson Pollock, or musicians such John Cage (he performed his *Water Walk* on the game show "I've Got a

Secret" in 1960), or in performance with Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* being first executed in 1959. Since dance is the primary artistic vernacular of the project that underlies this thesis, the focus of this examination will be how dance as an aesthetic expression of its practitioners has situated itself in these larger trends. The watershed moment for dance is commonly considered to have begun by way of studio showings and eventually performances in the spring and summer of 1962 at the Judson Memorial (Baptist) Church in New York's Greenwich Village by a group of writers, dancers, and visual artists interested in exploring the boundaries of dance form (Reynolds 397). This moment is colloquially known simply as "Judson."

Nancy Reynolds' seminal text on the history of dance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *No Fixed Points*, cautions against attempting to "anatomize the postmodern phenomenon by pigeonholing those themes" (401). She and coauthor Malcolm McCormick do believe, however, that the Judson movement was important enough to give it an intellectual framework. "The Judsonites rejected codified dance techniques and heroic syntaxes; interest in every kind movement replaced preconceptions about beauty and grace...Democratization of the space and open-ended acceptance of all bodies and all movement demystified dancing and situated it in the here and now. " Most importantly for the focus of this work is their observation that Judson placed emphasis on dance "movement rooted in everyday experience" (401). Judson is a critical pivot point for this examination because of how it speaks to three points on the historical continuum: the past, the immediate trends of the 1960s, and the future as exemplified in what would be later understood as community arts practice.



When put into the larger cultural context of this examination we see that Judson was not an end point, rather the act of starting a fire, albeit a big one. The Judsonites were directly and forcefully pushing away from the cultural structuring efforts a century earlier. When Judsonite Robert Dunn reframed the question "What is dance?" to "What isn't?" he was calling into question the whole concept of the expert that was so forcefully exerted a century prior (Reynolds 398). Why must there be an expert? Why must some things be included and some things excluded from what is viewed as dance?

Terry Anderson argues in *The Movement and the Sixties* that there were two "waves" of protest in the 1960s with a shift from the first to the second wave around 1968 (Preface). Judson typified this first wave, along with the other artistic and other social questioners (Civil Rights, Women's Rights, etc.). As products of the 1950s, they began to formally question the old order. They were characterized as "intellectual, idealistic, and ideological" (Preface). Another characteristic of this wave for Anderson was the reliance on leaders (consider Martin Luther King Jr., Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, etc.). This was somewhat ironic when considering its focus was the questioning of established order.

As will be discussed in greater detail in the coming pages, the final critical change for which Judson set the stage comes in two parts. First, as Arlene Goldbard defines community arts practice, cited in the introduction, "cultural meaning, expressions, and creativity reside within the community, that the community artist's task is to *assist...*" (Goldbard). By breaking the barrier of the expert, the next generation of artists could build off Judson by reimagining the role of the artist. The artist can act as a guide for a community to assist in the exploration of their own meaning, as opposed to directing or

imposing their own artistic vision. Second, "movement [could be] rooted in everyday experience" (Reynolds 401).

This final step in the continuum inspired by Judson started to take shape in Anderson's second wave. The seismic events of 1968 (the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, the riots at the Democratic National Party Convention in Chicago, My Lai in Vietnam, etc.) were not only a cultural turning point for the country but for the protests as well. The protests morphed from a being issue-oriented and focused around a leader to a more diffuse "movement," becoming "so broad that these activists felt part of it without joining any organization, and without even marching" (Anderson preface). The focus was now more directed towards on "empowerment and liberation." With the election of the conservative Nixon, along with the seemingly never ending war in Vietnam, many activists felt disenfranchised on a national level and so turned their focus towards "local issues, empowering themselves in their communities" (Anderson preface).

There was a parallel shift in the art world. Thomas Crow, in *The Rise of the Sixties*, an examination of the visual arts during this period as attempting to both lead and respond to the cultural trends of the decade, points out that "by the early 70s the New Left had lost much of its drive...any remaining hopes that artists could provide magical forms of political resistance rested on a mistaken understanding of the position occupied by artists in the most intensive years of the civil rights and anti-war movements" (179). Historian Phillip Jenkins, speaking from a political perspective, offers the even starker, more succinct conclusion that "with some obvious exceptions, the sixties values went down to defeat. The revolution failed" (2). With the diffusion and subsequent collapse of many of the

movements of the 1960s, the art world also lost its ability to shape the cultural and political discourse.

Though from a national perspective, Crow and Jenkins' observations may be accurate as Anderson pointed out, there was also a shift in focus by many artists to the community level. If grand solutions could not be achieved on a national level (the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, notwithstanding, racism remained a critical national issue, and the Equal Rights Amendment would fail in 1979), change could be made on the local level. It was at this point that another shift began, with artists such as Liz Lerman asking fundamental questions about the relationship between art and community. Dancer Lerman wondered early in her career, "Why would I want to live in a world where I have to choose between concert and community?" (xvii). Visual artist Steven Durland, reflecting back a decade later, wrote that artists who started focusing on community-based work "believed that the arbitrary separation of the art world and real world had made them less effective as artists and caused them to call into question their commitment to the public. This new sensibility didn't necessarily reject the art world, but rather viewed it as one of many contexts that in which art could exist" (xxii). Liz Lerman, and those inspired and taught by her in the decades to follow, including Peter DiMuro, Allison Orr, and many others, grabbed a hold of the opening Judson created, taking those ideas to the next logical step. If the first step was to shift focus to the community, Lerman moved beyond by famously asking, "Who gets to dance?" Allison Orr and other dance artists asked the logical next question: if dance can be based in the everyday as well as being grounded in the community, why cannot the dance movement itself come from the community? Why must it necessarily be based in what is more traditionally considered a

dance vocabulary? Orr's question was fundamentally different from Judson's examination of everyday movement because for the Judsonites, it was still the artist who executed the movement. Orr, on the other hand, was asking the same question but from the perspective of socially engaged art. Allison Orr elaborates:

As a choreographer I am inspired by virtuosic expressions of movement that come from people's daily lived experience. I am operating under a cross-cultural/anthropological assessment of dance as movement, which is designed specifically in space and time. I am also interested in authentic expressions of embodied knowledge. A person who picks up trash everyday develops an expertise that comes only from learning how to do that work in his/her body over and over again. Just like a professional ballet dancer, I see grace, skill, and expertise in the movement of people who perform highly practiced, rehearsed and codified movement in their daily work lives. Yes, I am influenced and am a product of a Post-Judson world where "anything can be dance." But I am not making a dance that we all do together. I am critical and selective. I think community-based dance can be somewhat misleading because people think that means anyone can do it. Not anyone can free climb at 100 ft. transmission tower, or expertly guide a sweeper truck in place. I am asking audiences and the people I work with to challenge their own cultural and ethnocentric assumptions of what dance is—but it is more about making a dance that I cannot make any other way (Orr interview).

If the community can be the wellspring then why cannot their movement be as well? If those two points were artistically valid then why should it not be the experts, the community members, expressing their movements? Lash's "incompetence of the layman " has been turned on its head.

This type of radical questioning and exploration do not end at this step. As we will explore in the next chapter, through the framework of the *Served* project, Orr continues her questioning, building off the past; she combines an aesthetic examination with a community-based practice that leads to civic engagement. Once again we see echoes of the 1960s as described above. In the Judson period there was a local questioning on an aesthetic level that helped to inspire a national conversation about cultural and social norms today. We are again seeing a local conversation led by artists such as Orr and others such as Aaron Landsman and his *City Council Meeting*, or Rick Lowe and Houston's Project Row Houses, or the many others marrying an aesthetic and community-based practice to infuse a new, broader conversation into the national discourse. George Santayana famously said in 1905, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." These artists are heeding that advice to look to the past and build on its innovations.

## Chapter 2 - The Project

*In a radical-fairy realness ritual, at least my version of one, you do not worship the creator; you worship the act of creating. You don't worship the hero; you worship the doing of the deed. You don't worship the artist; you worship the making of the art. And you don't worship the noun; you worship the verb.*

-Taylor Mac

*Served*, the project philosophically at the heart of this thesis, consists of three components. First, the performance, comprising a two-year residency working with students and community members to develop the performance itself, the performance, and a lengthy follow up period to examine the lasting affects on the community and foster further discussion. The second component of the project will be the building of a business model, allowing the artist to recreate *Served* on similar institutional campuses. The third component will be the development of a toolkit, to facilitate future community-based arts projects, for other artists and communities. Allison Orr, founder and artistic director of Austin based Forklift Danceworks, is a fundamental partner in this project. Orr's work, overall, has been focused on redefining how we view performance, and how we define "art": specifically, giving voice to the groups in a community that often go unheard, and bringing focus to the inherent mastery of their professions. *Served* brings Orr's work to a new community model (the college campus), and seeks both to bring the benefits of that expression to the specific community of Williams, and to create a framework for future communities and artists to engage in these conversations.

Orr's artistic practice shapes the details of the project, and as discussed in chapter one, her work fits into the larger trends developing in the field. However, before a detailed

examination of those trends, in chapter three, we need first to understand the artist in more depth. Finally, there needs to be a short discussion of how this work can be viewed as art. This last discussion may seem superfluous: as I have argued extensively in chapter one, community arts practice is an organic extension of the pushing against boundaries of what is considered dance that has been developing for the last sixty years. Nevertheless, there are influential figures, even within the dance community, who do not see this work as connected to the questioning that has formed the backbone of modern dance since Judson.

*Served* will be a large-scale dance performed by campus dish washers, cooks, and other food service staff, set site-specifically in William's large campus cafeteria for an audience of 1000+. Accompanied by original music and lighting design, the dance will feature approximately 30 employees performing choreography devised from their everyday work. Directed by choreographer Allison Orr, *Served* will be created through a two-year residency where Allison and Associate Choreographer Krissie Marty will embed within campus food service operations, learning about the work, and shadowing and interviewing employees. Site visits along with meetings with college administrators and food services workers have already begun, however, this is the preliminary work. The residency will formally begin with the start of the fall 2016 semester running through the end of the spring 2018 semester. While the premiere performance will happen November of 2017 the residency will continue for another semester to allow for the necessary follow-

up with the food service workers and audience members.<sup>5</sup> In addition to this follow-up work, the toolkit will be build during the spring semester of 2018.

Following a method rooted in relationship building, Allison and her team will spend the first full year getting to know food service staff and their work culture. Asking questions like "What do you love about your job?" and "What is the hardest thing about your work?", Orr will craft the dance through a process of listening to and engaging with campus food service staff over many months. The value of this relationship building cannot be underscored enough. This work is more than understanding the mechanics of their jobs, it is learning about, and having a deep knowledge of the people and their environment. One of the hallmarks of a community-based practice is the need to spend time in the community; it takes time to build trusting relationships. It is only from these relationships that a sincere conversation can flow.

By centering on the vital role of relationship, *Served* will also give students, faculty, and other Williams' staff an opportunity to learn about the principles of community-based art making practice. Serving as production assistants, Williams' students will be coached by Orr in how to conduct ethnographic research. Because Orr and her team will carry out this residency through ongoing visits to campus, specific students will be selected, in partnership with faculty liaisons, to continue research in between artistic visits. Just as building relationships is fundamental to Orr's practice, this process will encourage and allow the students and employees to build meaningful relationships as well.

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<sup>5</sup> The exact number of performances has yet to be determined. While there will be at least two, one in November 2016 and another on Claiming Williams day in February 2017, adding more performances will depend greatly on the capacity of the food service workers.



"By engaging with campus employees who prepare food for and feed students, *Served* is also intended to broaden awareness among students, faculty and staff of the valuable and essential contribution that these employees make to the well being of Williams College," explains Orr (Interview). This is a common theme for Orr. She uses dance as a means to "engage with the choreography of a vital work force that is frequently overlooked and often underappreciated." It is through this process of sharing the everyday, expert movement, along with their stories that she is able to transcend boundaries. In the case of *Served*, it is between the food service workers and the students they "serve." Relationship building and deep, long-term engagement are the paths through which we will begin to examine issues of class and privilege within a community of an elite institution that is successful, in part, by the skilled efforts of people who are unlikely to receive the same benefits. This type of community-based art making affords a two-way learning experience between seemingly polar opposite communities. It will show students that excellence and success do not necessarily look exactly like the one model that they have assiduously learned to-date: grades, test scores, and resume. For the food service workers, ironically, the same lesson can be offered. Their expertise and their experiences, while not gained from the elite institutions that society tells us are the definition of success, have critical value and are a vital part of the community.

The residency and performance are intended to create a community dialogue around inequities of class and privilege, but also to act as a prototype, showing how an artist-led community-based practice can be developed within a college/university setting. This prototype will act as a foundation for the latter two components of the larger project. The pre-performance period will have two distinct tracks that will merge over the course of

the residency. As discussed above, Orr, with members of Forklift Danceworks, will spend the first year getting to know the food service workers as well as their work environment. This process will mirror the creation of her 2009 collaboration with the Austin Sanitation Workers, which resulted in the performance called *Trash Project*. Orr will shadow the food service workers to not only understand their work environment and processes but them as individuals. Part of the creative process for Orr is a merging of the everyday, expert movements of the workers along with highlighting their individuality. This process creates a product that transcends the boundaries of a typical choreographic work by creating a performance that affords a unique, intimate connection to the performers. As a result it allows for a connection to a group of people with whom one might not commonly associate: the trash collectors, the police, or the dishwashers (the former two are groups that Orr worked with to create dance works). If our friends and neighbors are police officers we can more readily see them as one of us. If not, it becomes all too easy to consider the group and not the individual. We can see this playing out currently in our society around immigration, religion, and sexual/gender identity. These groups are not portrayed as individuals grouped around common concerns, but rather often as threatening monoliths. The group becomes the framing point instead of the individuals. Ivory Jackson Jr., an Austin sanitation worker, beautifully articulates this point by observing, "Once you get to know us as individuals then a title disappears. It is no longer there. Instead of me being a trash guy, I'm Ivory. Or he's Cory. Or he's John. He's Shane" (*Trash Dance*).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>The 2009 performance work that Orr created with the Austin Sanitation Workers is called *Trash Project*. Andrew Garrison's 2013 documentary film of the making and performance of *Trash Project* is called *Trash Dance*.

The value of expressing the individual will be articulated in greater detail in the section examining Orr's process. For the purposes of this discussion of the project, emphasis on the individual is a fundamental goal of *Served* in that it creates a bridge between two communities on campus. It is important to note here that the food service workers involved in this production are not passive participants. Besides being compensated for all their time while working on the project and a direct improvement in the work environment (see below footnote seven for examples of the direct results to the performers from *Trash Project*), a feeling of self-actualization is generated. *Trash Dance* gives voice to the deep, personal impact to the performers. Compare the comments by sanitation workers Chris Guerrero and Lee Houston as just one example. "[My daughter] thinks it is the coolest thing in the world because I get to drive a big truck. She doesn't understand that I pick up trash...She will come see me one day and I will be in a truck. It will smell bad. That will be probably be the day [she will say] that is nasty dad." "My daughter, she was in the front row, clapping her hands, mouth open. When she saw all these people, and she saw dad coming out of this big truck, she said, all of these people are clapping for my dad! Wow" (*Trash Dance*).

The second track for the development of *Served* is to work directly with students both in and out of the classroom. As of this writing, Williams College is two-thirds of the way through a three-year Andrew W. Mellon Foundation supported Choreographers-in-Residence with Ronald K. Brown and Emily Johnson. Capitalizing on the foundations they have laid, Allison Orr will reach out to faculty whose curriculums speak to the themes of marginalization, class, and privilege, to list just three. Just as Brown and Johnson have done, Orr will guest lecture on how her work responds to and attempts to redress some of

these societal concerns. In addition to working in the classroom, we will explore accredited independent studies in partnership with Williams' Learning in Action department so that students can be afforded the opportunity to have an extended, in-depth experience with the creation of *Served*.

One of the stated goals of this project is to create a real community conversation around these concerns of class and privilege on campus. These needs have been identified as a priority on campus by Williams College through the formation of on the Claiming Williams Committee, on whose programming committee I have served since 2013. The committee was formed in in 2009 in response to "racist and sexist incidents" on campus ("Examining the Williams Way"). As a response, the committee is charged with creating a day of programming at the beginning of each spring semester with the specific goal of "challenging the effects of the College's history of inequality that are based on privileges of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion, we will provoke individual, institutional, and cultural change" ("Examining the Williams Way"). While we will work closely with the committee and committed project partner Steve Klass, the Vice President for Campus Life, engaging the students and the food service workers in all parts of the creation of this project it vital to the success of the project. In keeping with the core principles of community-based practice, this project must be developed from within the community instead being imposed on the community.

The formal structures of Williams, such as Claiming Williams, offer one perspective on this issue. As mentioned in the introduction, the food service workers have another, passionate perspective as well. "No one cares about us" is one recurring sentiment (Anon Food Service 2). The workers interviewed for this thesis were so concerned about

retribution for articulating their experience that they asked to remain anonymous.

Reinforcing this point one added: "Oh there is bullying here. Sure they talk a good game but they will come after you" (Anon Food Service 1). These fears reinforce the need for deep relationship building on all levels to create a safe space that allows for dialogue between the food service, the college administration, and the student community. "If those kids want something they will get it or pitch a fit!" adds another worker, a sentiment that highlights the chasm that *Served* seeks to carefully bridge (Anon Food Service 3). The students and the food service workers, working in collaboration with Orr will create a final project that speaks to these concerns.

Finally, the last element of the performance component of *Served* is the post-performance follow-up. As will be outlined in the next two sections, *Served* will move to other campuses. As demonstrated in the below footnote seven, follow-up is important for understanding the success of the project but also in shaping its future iterations. We will rely on Forklift's extensive rubric of active follow-up, with the performers, students, and audience. This process will include surveys and interviews. The results of these findings will be formally shared with the Williams community through the Claiming Williams Committee, as well as with the touring partners.

The second component of the *Served* project is to build a viable business model for Forklift Danceworks that allows this type of community engagement artistic practice to tour to colleges and universities around the country. The University of Houston, Wake Forest University, and Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) have all expressed interest in presenting variations of *Served* adapted to their specific needs. This type of artist-led engagement requires significant investments of time in each community both by

the artist and community members; as a result the outlay of both time and money make this type of practice prohibitive for most institutions. The creation process at Williams College will give Forklift the necessary time to identify the key elements of the project that will then allow for the work to be more easily recreated on other campuses. Our anticipated outcomes are for not only a valuable community experience through the performance in November of 2017, but for the effects of this work to ripple through the community in the months and years after the performance, as was the result with *Trash Project*. Steve Klass has asked us to consider how a *Served* can be remounted on Claiming Williams Day so that the value of this work can be reinforced on campus.

Building off of the first two components, the final element of the *Served* project is to provide a toolkit for future artists and presenters to collaborate on this type of work. Where the second component of this project is focused specifically on building a business model to allow Forklift to recreate *Served*, this toolkit is designed to offer a structural framework for artists and presenters to build this type of work, irrespective of *Served*. As with the business model component we have identified partners, such as Keene State College and University of Saint Joseph, who have expressed interest in the construction and use of the toolkit. The toolkit will receive a closer examination in chapter four as it is through that component that *Served* attempts to break new ground.

As we will see in the next section profiling Orr, the basic elements and goals of *Served* are an extension of her artistic practice. Orr and Forklift are amassing a long list of projects that engage her practice to work with a variety of communities, most recently with *RE Source* at the Central Texas Goodwill, *The Trees of Govalle* in collaboration with the City of Austin's Urban Forestry Division, and *PowerUP* in collaboration with Austin Energy, to

name just three. *Served*, with its three components, will build off this practice to create new ways for Forklift, as well as college/university campuses to create this type community-based performance practice around the country.

What do you get when you cross an anthropologist, a social worker, and a dance artist? Allison Orr. Wesleyan University hosted a symposium in November of 2015 titled *Where On Earth are We Going?* (Orr "The Artist In The City"). Orr's lecture, "The Artist In The City: Civic Engagement & Social Change Through The Creative Process," began with her asking the audience to close their eyes and imagine a dancer coming into the space. She asks us to consider what kind of dancer comes to mind. "Is it someone you know? Someone like you? A professional, trained dancer?" She then asks us, provocatively, if the dancer could be "a police officer, directing imaginary traffic on stage...[or] a baseball player...[or] a sanitation worker...[or] a pair of urban forestry technicians, planting a tree...or a power lineman, ascending a 85 foot transmission tower." All of these "dancers" have featured prominently in her work as a choreographer. In this world, a dancer could be any of the people listed above, or a member of the many other occupations that our society would not normally associate with the term dancer.

Understanding the essence of what makes someone a dancer is at the core of Allison Orr's thought, in which a dancer is one who is an expert mover, a master of his/her movement vocabulary through both practice and creativity. This conceptualization of dance places Orr squarely in the tradition of artists such as Marcel Duchamp's "found art" or John Cage's examination of music in the everyday world around him as opposed to necessarily through instruments. Like Cage, for whom the "primary act of musical

performance was not making music, but listening" Orr echoes that perspective in choreography ("John Cage"). In an interview (Orr 2015), she recounts the following anecdote while working on her MFA at Mills College where she frequented a local cafeteria called the Tea Shop. The Tea Shop has three large windows. One day while sitting there alone, between rehearsals, she looked up to see a man washing windows. He was on the outside and thus facing her, as if onstage. She was transfixed watching this person move. "It was *so* beautiful...that was what I wanted to see" in dance performance. Her epiphany, and the window washer, were incorporated into the third section of a performance work that was created soon thereafter with campus employees. "The audience was in tears...there was something about how the audience was transformed." Orr wryly punctuates the window washer story by noting that her final, more formal, thesis choreography "could not compare" to this earlier chance choreographic experiment.

"I wish I could go back and remember what I thought back then" Orr reflected about this early inspiration. "I was kind of stumbling along. I did not have some big trajectory"; in other words she was just making work that felt true to her. While she may have been stumbling then, she is now on a quest, a crusade of sorts, to show her artistic peers and audiences that beautiful, transformative movement can be found all around us. Her explorations of these ideas led her to explore the work of other community-based artists. The work of community-based choreographer Liz Lerman, with whom Orr interned at Lerman's Dance Exchange after graduate school, has proven deeply influential. Lerman notably once observed that "You are a dancer if you take two technique classes a day, wait tables, behave and dress a certain way, perform once a year...You are not a dancer if you teach dance in a senior center. You are a social worker" (Cohen-Cruz "Local Acts" 173).



Lerman's experience around what it means to be considered a dancer motivated Orr to think more deeply about the term.

Orr is very mindful about using the term "dancer" as opposed to a more generic, open-ended term such a "mover." By invoking a word that has a deep cultural resonance, she highlights that the movements used by people who are masters in their respective fields can rise to the same level of expertise, beauty, and even artistry as the movements more commonly associated with dance. Through the process of spotlighting everyday movement we are forced to question our assumptions about expertise, beauty, and artistry. In the act of bringing these seemingly disparate concepts together Orr attempts to invoke mastery of movement—which is at the core of what we think of when we consider a beautiful dance gesture—that each of the above examples requires. From this perspective, the merging of beauty and excellence required by a person moving through space on a stage is no different than that required by a power linesman working on a transmission tower. If this is true, Orr might ask, why differentiate them?

The prolific documentarian of community-based performance Jan Cohen-Cruz posits that a defining component of community-based practice is its hyphenated nature.

"Community-based performance is hyphenated in consisting of both multiple disciplines— aesthetics and something else, such as education, community building, or therapy—and multiple functions, having as goals both efficacy and entertainment" ("Local Acts" 97). Art may be a starting point for Orr, but through a community practice it becomes a vehicle not only for larger cultural expression but, as Orr would argue, amplifies the level of the art as well.

When, at the Wesleyan symposium, she was asked to describe the process by which she identifies and creates a new work, she explained that she first looks for movement that can form the basis of aesthetic expression. But that is only where the research begins. The next step in her process is to find the story of a community that needs to be told. Orr's 2009 signature work *Trash Project* revolved not only around finding the beauty and humanity embedded in the day-to-day work of sanitation workers but also used the dance of these sanitation workers as a vehicle to connect one community that has expressed feeling isolated and disenfranchised because of their race and their work back to the larger whole. Don Anderson, Austin Sanitation Worker, lamented in *Trash Dance* that the larger community does appreciate that their work is dangerous and requiring of expertise: "we are professionals" (*Trash Dance*). In this way her work is more than a celebration of community; it is a way to empower a community. "We share stories, build understanding, express values, and generate dialogue," Orr explained at the symposium. She continued, "This leads to a deeper sense of belonging and sense of agency, and ultimately can change the narrative about a place and its neighbors, workers, and citizens in a positive way."

Just as Orr continually questions established notions of dance, as Liz Lerman questions, "Who gets to dance?", she is also continuously reexamining her own practice (Lerman 39). Where does highlighting or building community take us? Where can dance take us next? For Orr, the next step in the evolution from connecting movement to community is to connect community to civic engagement. "Now I will return to my bold statement that the creative process might be our best tool to foster civic engagement and social change," she continued at the symposium. Moving on to her core question she adds, "You've seen the how it works...now let's consider the why. Why does the creative process

make it work?" If it is possible to distill an entire philosophy down to one word, the response to her question would be: empowerment. Through the creative process the requirement of taking risk that sincere expression demands, especially during the act of making a dance, forces participants to open themselves to trusting one another.<sup>7</sup> Also through that risk-taking people must "show themselves" in new ways which surprise even themselves. "When making a dance, you have to communicate, and through that people build connection and understanding." Finally, Orr sees the final step as: "The act of making something together also gives us a larger project that engages our minds in new and expansive ways. We get to think big." It is impossible to risk, to trust, to communicate in new ways, to build community, and not then believe what you have to say is of value. Again, the key term here is empowerment. Empowerment is defined as "the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights" ("Empowerment").

It is this act of empowering people that "changes the dialogue about what it means to be a better citizen." This final idea is what Orr is trying to accomplish through dance. "It is important to create awe!" she declared at a November 2015 presentation (Orr, "Lunch with an Artist"). For Orr, awe has many dimensions. Yes, she must, first, as a creator of a performance, inspire awe in her audiences. It becomes their point of entry into her work. It then shifts to awe of who that *person* is on the "stage." The awe in that very same moment

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<sup>7</sup> In the follow-up work to projects such as *Trash Project* one of the outcomes was that co-workers learned to trust each other more, leading directly to improvements in quality of work and productivity. "6 years later, 90% of survey respondents said they are better at working collaboratively with others, they consider themselves more of a leader at work, and they communicate more effectively with their supervisors. 80% said they contribute ideas more frequently. 64% consider themselves to be a more creative person" (Orr, "The Artist In The City") The Austin Sanitation Department employs 250 people, 24 performed and an additional 50 acted in a support capacity for *Trash Project* (Orr interview).

shifts again from the viewer to the performer, to the long ignored sanitation worker showing his or her mastery of a large, unwieldy crane. We, the viewer, see the awe of the spectacle, which opens the door to awe of the individual while the performer simultaneously is in awe of how he or she is valued for doing what he has long labored to master, not for the crane or the institution he or she works for but the accomplishment. How can we not be transformed in this moment? It is that transformation, for Allison Orr, which is how we start to build a better world.

The question remains, however: these are all admirable aspirations, but is this dance? Clearly Orr's practice, with its hyphenation, meets Cohen-Cruz's definition of a community-based practice but is it also an artistic practice? In an early conversation with Orr, which served as one of the catalysts for this collaboration, she mentioned that as part of her grant application rejection from a leading national dance funding organization the panel asked two questions of her corpus of work, "Is it art?" and "Does it rise to the level of excellence?" In mock exasperation she answered both these questions by asking, "Did Judson ever happen?"

The juxtaposition of these questions raises yet another, more relevant, question that may provide a possible launching point to a satisfactory answer: "What is the purpose of art?" Andy Horwitz offers one response in his January 2016 Atlantic article by saying that "art reflects the values, aspirations, and questions of a culture; it's a mechanism for a society to articulate how it imagines itself." Allison Orr is only a choreographer in the macro sense. In her work she shapes the larger project only by creating a choreographic framework. The individual "employees" create their own dance by both showing their expertise of movement as well as by allowing this expertise to express their own values

and aspirations through that movement. In other words, this is an embodied aesthetic practice. How each person chooses to move through space, whether they are a ballet dancer or a trash collector, is an expression of his or her worldview. Michael Orlove, the Artist Communities, Presenting & Multidisciplinary Works Director at the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) reinforces this point when he says, "Allison Orr's work is very emblematic" of the trend towards a deeper examination of the relevancy of the performing arts. Her work has a "social/civic connection, the work is speaking to [specific] populations, it speaks to a problem...the art is just part of the whole package. Who can't relate to her work? She [and a growing community of artists] are making work that everyone can feel like they can participate in it" (Interview).

But does it rise to the level of excellence? Liz Lerman, for one, cautions us about what benchmarks are used to judge excellence. It is easy to allow institutions, or infrastructures, to guide us. However, as will be examined in greater detail in chapter four, our infrastructures (e.g. traditional arts organizations) are deeply out of sync with the evolving arts culture. As a result they are also out of sync with (or at the very least not totally representative of) a complete understanding of artistic excellence. In other words, just because major arts infrastructures do not support community-based work, it does not indicate a lack of artistic excellence. When considering excellence Lerman observes that "if ever there were a challenge to excellence, it is in knowing in whose path you are walking and in which space you will get to show or make or describe or teach your life's work" (137). Lerman asks three questions when considering excellence. For Lerman, these questions serve not only to evaluate excellence in dance, but that of any practice. Her questions are: "First is that those involved are 100 percent committed to what they are

doing. Second is that they know why they are doing it. And third, perhaps the most difficult to discern, is there something revealed" (224).

Allison's Orr's *Trash Project* is an example of all three of Lerman's criteria. As one example from the production, the surprising emotional climax of *Trash Dance* is a crane solo by Don Anderson. It was surprising, says Orr, because while she knew the solo would be a standout moment, Anderson's connection to the moment and the subsequent performance along with the audience's connection to that solo caught everyone off guard. Throughout the documentary we see that Anderson is one of Orr's early supporters among the sanitation workers. His job, as the "bulk item collector," is to work a bucket crane off the back of a small truck. Together, Orr and Anderson created a solo where he demonstrates the beauty and skill of his labor. Early in the process he is skeptical, saying of Orr, "She is crazy, trying to get trucks to dance." Yet by the eve of the performance his perspective has shifted, and he recounts that "it is almost indescribable the rush and the feeling you get when you are up there and working this thing. I truly believe that I am the person to make that crane solo as good as it can be" (*Trash Dance*).

Anderson's transformation exemplifies the art that Orr is creating outside traditional infrastructures. In her words, "It is about me setting up the possibility of people to show themselves...in a really personal way [through dance] and for people to leave feeling more connected to each other; people that don't even know each other. It is setting up an opportunity for all of us to be in this shared moment of what Don's life is like, that is what it is about" (*Trash Dance*). If this is not the definition of artistic excellence, it is hard to understand what is. Looking back at Lerman's rubric, the documentary shows that all those who participated are fully committed to the project, they have a deep understanding both

in terms of the movements required to do their jobs at a high level but also the performance choreography, and, as we so clearly see with Anderson, something profound has been revealed.

In light of this discussion of *Served*, as well as of Orr's inspirations and resulting practice, the ways in which *Served* has been designed to address to issues of class and privilege on the Williams campus become evident. The Forklift artists and I are intentionally tapping into the liberal-arts tradition at Williams as part of an exploration of how the arts can be used to address cultural needs on different parts of the campus and to see how we can also push the boundaries of this form. In the next chapter I shall examine some of the larger cultural trends that use arts-centered projects to address particular community needs, further demonstrating the relevancy of *Served* and projects like it on campuses across America. By borrowing from Cohen-Cruz's hyphenation framework discussed earlier and combining community engagement projects with the larger trends discussed in the next chapter, we will better see both the foundations as well as the true value of socially engaged art. Chapter three thus speaks to the immediacy of this artistic practice: why is this work important now?

### Chapter 3 - Contemporary Trends

*Arts organizations still use the traditional model of churches to organize themselves as places to come at a proscribed time of the week to observe and receive a set of texts and experiences.*

*The best arts organizations have eschewed that model...borrowing the model of 7-Eleven: a place that is always open and that can meet a huge array of needs.*

-Elizabeth Streb (Borwick "Building Communities" 6)

Up to this point we have examined the larger historical cultural trends in performance as well as *Served*, a tailor-made project, and how it fits into those trends. Now we will explore contemporary social trends as they have an impact on the performing arts, that in turn will lead us to the community arts practice as a response. The eventual goal, in the conclusion, is to show how these forces intersect with *Served*. Our point of departure will be to examine why there is an urgent cultural need for community-based practice. This urgency can be best seen in what Doug Borwick describes a point of crisis in the performing arts. As we shall see, this crisis stems from performing arts organizations not adapting to the changing needs of the communities they serve and, as a consequence, border on irrelevancy. Finally, as one of this thesis' overall arguments is that community arts practice is a valuable response to this crisis, we then need to understand how and why this practice works.

Doug Borwick, in his 2015 *Engage Now! A Guide to Making the Arts Indispensable*, sounds a clarion call for artists and producers to reimagine how they engage with communities. He analogizes this country's arts infrastructures to that of the "buggy whip makers" at the turn of the 20th century who were faced with a seismic change to their business environment with the advent of automobiles.



Concerns and action for the welfare of communities must take precedence over service to art...The impending crisis (some would say existing crisis) will necessitate new ways of thinking about core product, relationship with those served, and the nature of what organizations attempt to do in their communities...*Blindness to the need for change or insufficient transformation in response to that need will have the same result for arts institutions as that experienced by buggy whip makers, photographic film manufacturers, and the nation's print media* (Borwick emphasis) ("Engage Now!" 33).

Michael Orlove of the NEA underscores this point in a recent interview. In speaking about the urgent need for making artistic work more relevant to the community he said, "The days are gone where institutions can be satisfied with just putting something onstage" (Orlove Interview).

This crisis stems from the Eurocentric worldview on which this country was founded, both culturally and artistically, in combination with the rapidly shifting demographics in the United States. Put another way, the dominant artistic and financial framework on which most arts institutions are built is becoming less and less viable. If we contrast Borwick's summation of the Eurocentric model—"established arts organizations have, as a result of their evolution, support structures, and programming assumptions, been cut off from the lifeblood of the evolving culture of the United States"—with his summation of the non-Eurocentric model—"artistic expression worldwide is participatory, inclusive, and community-based"—we can clearly see that with the inevitable shift in demographics, just as with the inevitable widespread acceptance of the automobile, the former will eventually crumble under the weight of the latter (Borwick, "Building

Communities" 12 & 16). One example of this can be seen vividly in the steady stream of failing ballet companies, or the continuous financial distress of the "legacy" companies, which focus on one person's artistic vision, such as Limón, Martha Graham, Trisha Brown, David Parons to just name four. Even the stalwart Paul Taylor Dance Company has shifted its artistic vision, and name, to the more inclusive Paul Taylor's American Modern Dance. When seemingly immovable objects such as arts institutions are set against the larger cultural tide, which "is a process, not a fixed condition, it is the product of unremitting interaction between the past and present," an inevitable crisis ensues (Levine 33).

While it is not within the purview of this work to deeply examine the nature of social marginalization in a larger societal context, it is important to explore some of the basic frameworks. This framework will not only show the corrosive nature of the marginalization but will also offer an opportunity for an aesthetic practice to intervene.

A starting point for this examination is sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. Cultural capital in this context is "a set of relations and knowledge accumulated in operating in a particular field" (Thompson 84). These relations or rules are accumulated through our experiences over a lifetime; they help us navigate our world. As we become proficient in these rules there is an equal accumulation of cultural capital (Thompson 84). We master these rules by understanding the mores of the society in which we live. How do people act in our society? What are the common references or touchstones? Mastery is critical because these rules are the foundational tools that enable us to succeed in a social world. Consequently, as we succeed in a particular society we gain social capital. Curator Nato Thompson emphasizes the point by saying that "social capital, in turn, represents the estimated financial benefits associated with someone's power inside

a specific milieu" (84). Thompson goes on to note that understanding how to successfully navigate our world is not just a matter of understanding the right words to say or clothes to wear, but it also frames how "we end up seeing the world and carrying ourselves through it" (85). How we see and carry ourselves is a reflection of how we think of ourselves and our level of empowerment within the society.

Bourdieu, building off cultural capital, refers to these social structures and mores as habitus. The "orchestration of habitus" helps to create a "commonsense world" where the meaning of phrases and ideas is consistent and commonly understood (Bordieu 80). Colloquialisms are an example of this. Bourdieu sees this as a self-reinforcing process. This self-reinforcing process creates for Bourdieu a "homogeneity of habitus" which, in turn, limits not only who can participate in this process but also who can benefit from its rewards (80).

Every confrontation between agents in fact brings together, in an *interaction* defined by the *objective structure* of the relation between the groups they belong to (e.g. a boss giving orders to a subordinate, colleagues discussing their pupils, academics taking part in a symposium), systems of dispositions (carried by "natural persons") such as a linguistic competence and cultural competence and, through these habitus, all the objective structures of which they are the product, structures which are active only when *embodied* in a competence acquired in the course of a particular history...Thus we speak of class habitus (Bourdieu emphasis) (Bourdieu 81).

Thompson relates Bourdieu's argument to this discussion of social marginalization by saying, "most class barriers are simply a kind of controlled access to the social capital of that community" (Thompson 86).

One of the many ways to control access to social capital is through spatial restrictions. These restrictions are on display in any traditional theater with its many "tiers" and "boxes" with various price levels. Psychologist Robert Somer makes the connection between space and status by observing that "society compensates for blurred social distinctions by clear spatial ones" (in Levine 60). Limiting access to space limits the ability to acquire social capital. Thompson supports his conclusion by observing that infrastructures (spaces) are simply a "series of structures all of which working together produce meanings" (59). Taken together, our theaters, which are representations of cultural norms, not only create powerful symbols of who is allowed access to culture, but also reinforce social marginalization by limiting access to the ability to acquire social capital. As we saw in the discussion of systematic efforts at cultural structuring a century ago, dividing the audiences was part of this process. While this may no longer be the intention of arts managers, the physicality of the space inherited from a century ago, as well as modern pricing structures, act to reinforce the notion of who gets access to "preferred seating." These seemingly unrelated business decisions serve as powerful symbols of cultural and social exclusion. The structures around our arts infrastructures—physical, financial, linguistic, corporeal—not only alienate many of the very communities we profess to want to engage but also create barriers that keep new communities, ones without learned appreciation for the arts in formal infrastructures<sup>8</sup>, from engaging with us.

Borwick comes to a similar conclusion about the increasing irrelevance of traditional arts infrastructures, albeit from an arts management perspective. He lists a number of factors: first is the changing demographics (by the 2040's this country is

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<sup>8</sup>One needs to only look to the ever-diminishing arts budgets in our country's primary education systems.

expected to be a "majority minority nation") with its concomitant shift away from the Eurocentric model of culture, secondly the rise of "participatory culture" through the Internet, and thirdly the decline in acceptance of the authority structure on which the performing arts is based ("Engage Now!" 23 & 28). The result for arts institutions is not that they will become less important to the audiences for which this cultural framework has value; rather, more simply, those audiences "will become an increasingly smaller percentage of the population at large" ("Engage Now!" 33).

As we can see, the notion of "relevancy" is a multi-layered, deeply complex issue. Jan Cohen-Cruz offers two observations based on the mission and vision of Roadside Theater in Norton, VA as the initial steps toward acknowledging these layers as a way out of this crisis. First, it is critical to understand that "politics are inescapable," which harkens back to Bourdieu ("Local Acts" 64). The politics of habitus must be acknowledged. It must be acknowledged that the arts play a vital role in the construction of society and how we view ourselves. How often have we heard that a particular minority, for example, could not connect with a particular work because they did not see representations of themselves or their community onstage? Cohen-Cruz's second point comes from Roadside's founder Dudley Cocke. Cocke offers that that we need to "begin with where the community is. Not ahead (unrealistic) or behind (patronizing)" ("Local Acts" 65). Thompson expands on this point by adding that "if we want to change the meaning of the world we simply need to diagram an infrastructure, visit it, and radically alter it" ("Local Acts" 60). We need to radically alter our arts infrastructures so that we are able to meet our audiences where they are.

Increasingly, artists are developing more and more examples of how to radically reimagine our infrastructures. Aaron Landsman's 2012 *City Council Meeting* is just one recent example. This work is a reenactment of local government by members of the community. "There is something about being in the room we find galvanizing – here is a connection to power we can see" ("History"). Landsman demonstrates how simply embodying a space, through performing in the seat of power as represented by city council rooms, stimulates a transformation in the performer's perspective on government. In the act of changing audience and performer's interaction to the space Landsman is allowing for a reimagining of our relationship to it and all the symbols it represents. Again we see that symbols have power, especially for community members without the cultural capital to imagine themselves able to participate in government, let alone actually have power. Thompson concludes that by "changing the infrastructures that circulate our idea of what is what, we can ultimately change who we are" and consequently we can also change not only our role in society but society itself (Thompson 81).

Now that we have examined both the urgency as well as the consequences of not being mindful of the ways our infrastructures reinforce social marginalization, we need to explore how a socially engaged artistic practice can respond to these inequities. Landsman offers one perspective, but what are the underlying structures that make this practice successful? In *Local Acts*, Jan Cohen-Cruz outlines four foundational principles at the heart of successful community arts performance: communal context, reciprocity, hyphenation, and active culture ("Local Acts" 91).

While this point may seem obvious, it is critical that community-based performance needs to originate within the community to have resonance. This is Cohen-Cruz's first

grounding principle. In Cohen-Cruz's words, "communal expression is rooted in the recognition that much creativity and meaning come out of the group" ("Local Acts" 92). The artist and their craft support the community, in contrast to being imposed upon on the community. The artist may act as the catalyst for shaping or, in some structures, may even provide the primary form of expression, but the ideas and energy originate from the community's concerns. The collective meaning is more important than the expression of the individual, a departure from a Euro-centric model that puts the emphasis on a "formal, distanced aesthetics...[which, as a consequence] may underappreciate art driven by a personal connection to the material and a need to communicate"(Cohen-Cruz "Local Acts" 109). Liz Lerman, a long-time practitioner of community arts practice, exemplifies this point well when she speaks of working with older artists. Gone is the expectation of "seeing how high someone's leg is going to go," rather there is a focus on what the artist brings to the movement, relying not on his or her virtuosity but rather on lived experience (Cohen-Cruz "Local Acts"174). The first step in relevance then is to prioritize the community's concerns not only as artistic fodder, but also the act of giving value to the class habitus of the community.

The second grounding principle is reciprocity. Community arts work must establish a relationship between the artist and community that is "mutually nourishing" (Cohen-Cruz "Local Acts" 93). The keys to this principle are listening and respect on both sides. The artist must listen for what is at the heart of the community's concern or need. Liz Lerman advises, when listening in this way, to try to understand "what made the connections happen" (Interview). It is through these connections where the real priorities and concerns can be found. Contrasting to this point is the "apparatus of hierarchy" that is at the core of

traditional performing arts with the director or playwright sitting on the top (Cohen-Cruz "Local Acts" 95). In this model the artist has the final say on what is offered in the performance. Years ago, as a young stage manager, when I was working with a cast of famous actors/actresses working on a new play by an equally famous playwright, an actress was asked after a preview performance if she had altered a few lines. Her defensive response was, "if it is on the page, it is on the stage!" There was no space in this process for personal interpretation by the actress despite her years of experience, only the playwright's written words were valid.

The third principle, discussed in chapter three, is of hyphenation. Community arts work is a hyphenation of multiple disciplines. The tension between "ritual/efficacy and art/entertainment" is the allure of community arts work (Cohen-Cruz "Local Acts" 97). Cohen-Cruz argues that performance can be seen as on a spectrum with ritual on one end and entertainment on the other. On the ritual end there is no audience per se: the group acts together, the performer is "possessed and the audience participates and believes" ("Local Acts" 5). In contrast, in art or entertainment the performer knows he/she is just acting a role while the audience is merely observing. Moving to either end of the spectrum, such as a Catholic mass for ritual or a television show such as "Dancing with the Stars" as entertainment, shows how each is clearly oriented towards a specific, limited performative goal. It is at the center of this continuum that community arts work situates itself, trying to find a balance between the two ends. It requires many perspectives and offers many in return.

Finally, there is the principle of active culture. This principle acknowledges that "people frequently get more out of making art than seeing the fruits of the other people's



labors" (Cohen-Cruz "Local Acts" 99). Ferdinand Lewis of the Cornerstone Theater speaks of "inclusiveness and diversity" as elements of active culture. Active culture is a "framework for creativity, [a] concept of diversity [that] can free the imagination from monolithic ideas, and encourage unexpected collaborations" (Cohen-Cruz "Local Acts" 100). It is inclusiveness that allows for the transformative impact of community arts work. As we saw with *City Council Meeting*, "active participation in art changes people's relationship to the subject in a way that passive viewership cannot" (Cohen-Cruz "Local Acts" 107). Another way to think of this principle is that active, group participation in the creation of a work creates its own cultural capital. While the end product is of real value, active culture is created not through receiving a final product but rather by the act of creating the work together as a community.

This chapter has examined the urgency for arts institutions to reimagine how they engage with their community from multiple angles. It has also laid the foundation for how to reimagine community engagement. The model of the expert presenting a product for passive consumption, a model so assiduously crafted a century ago, is showing its fundamental flaw: the alienation of the very communities arts institutions wish to serve. As the communities change, so must organizations, or they will face the same fate as the buggy whip makers. There is no universal law that says an arts organization, be it a presenter/producer or an artist-lead ensemble, must exist. Ultimately only organizations that can find a meaningful connection to their communities will be able to survive.

Throughout this thesis we have seen ways that artists have responded to this changing landscape. The next, penultimate chapter in this thesis offers a model for one thin

slice of the arts producing community—college and university presenters in collaboration with artists—to effectively participate in community engagement.

## Chapter 4 - The Toolkit

*Hard work is hard.* – Krissie Marty

*Turn discomfort into inquiry.* – Liz Lerman

The final step in our examination is returning back to the third part of *Served*, the toolkit as outlined briefly in chapter three. In this chapter we will examine the toolkit in more detail; however, it is valuable to note that the toolkit has not yet been built. Just as with community-based practice, the building of the toolkit will be in response to the community it is designed for. Its creation will be the final stage of the multi-year relationship between Forklift Danceworks and Williams College. The toolkit will be created not only responding to the needs to the Williams community but it will also incorporate the concerns of the regional college and university partners with the intention of making it flexible enough to be used on any campus. One size does not, in fact, fit all. If *Served's* intentions, as a performative project, are to support the local at Williams, the toolkit's intentions are the same with a broader, more geographically diverse community in mind. Once the framework for the toolkit has been examined, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of how it is designed to serve the community.

The most direct way to start an examination of the toolkit is to first address the need to which it is responding and then show how the toolkit is designed to meet that need. In her 2010 *Engaging Performance: Theatre as Call and Response* Jan Cohen-Cruz offers a broad spectrum of examples and methodologies for community-based work. This text is valuable in the context of this chapter because, set in contrast, it not only shows how the toolkit is offering something new but also it highlights the need to which the toolkit is responding.

Cohen-Cruz examines a cross section of artists and their different perspectives towards responding to community needs through a performative practice, artists such as Bertolt Brecht, Augusto Boal, Doreen Massey, Liz Lerman, and others. After detailing each perspective she offers specific examples for how artists can approach each practice. Cohen-Cruz's excellent text examines an aesthetic practice around one particular artist or set of community needs. Whereas Cohen-Cruz, whose work typifies discussions around this practice, is speaking exclusively to artists, this toolkit, in contrast, is specifically reaching out to artists in partnership with performing arts presenters/producers<sup>9</sup> on college and university campuses. This anchor is not arbitrary. During the initial conversation phase with potential partners, which included Allison Orr, new project ideas were eschewed in favor of asking Orr to recreate one of her past works in their community. Potential partners also lamented their insufficient resources to present one of Orr's works. The response and subsequent solution to these questions gets to the heart of a community-based practice: each work speaks to a specific set of needs and assets at a given time and place. Just as Heraclitus observed that one cannot enter the same river twice, as it is always changing, as is the person who enters it, so too with community-based projects. Community-based work defies commodification. This is equally the solution in that the toolkit will be framed, in part, as a set of questions designed to highlight not only the idiosyncrasies of a particular environment but also to show the assets along with potential problems. This, in turn, directly informs the building of the resulting project.

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<sup>9</sup> A "presenter" is someone who brings already created productions to their community as opposed to a "producer" who helps to create a new production. Since both frameworks for bringing performance to a campus are open to being a partner in creating community-based work, for simplicity, I will use the more common term of "presenter."

This toolkit takes a different, more pragmatic approach than Cohen-Cruz by starting with the questions: how can an artist, in collaboration with an arts presenter, engage in this work from a logistics and resource perspective? What are the underlying principles that make this work, on any scale, possible so that it can be adapted to multiple campuses?

Building off the starting point of showing the collaborators how they can successfully partner, the toolkit lays a foundation for how resources can be identified to fit the project. Put another way, how the framework can be adjusted to be in sync with the community's resources. Tom Borrup argues for a "radical" notion towards how to approach the work of creating "arts and culture," by starting from the perspective of what you have, not what you do not have. In other words, one must approach the organization or community as assets, focusing on what is special and unique, as opposed the predominate negative perspective, what is missing, such the perfect building, enough money, the ideal artist(s), etc. He is not suggesting "making do," rather advocating for "using our creativity to see what you've got and using it to leverage more – building on strengths to overcome weakness" ("What's Revolutionary About Valuing Assets"). The toolkit is designed to keep this radical notion at the fore for two reasons. First, it is critical to understand the resources available to realistically build a project but, more importantly, it speaks to the essence of community-based work. These are the assets and, as a result, they are the tools at hand to lay the foundation for creating the project. By approaching work from these perspectives space is opened for a community conversation. Necessarily these questions are brought to the fore: What are the assets? What concerns do we wish to address or redress? The creative process acts as a stimulus for deeper community conversation and examination.

There is a need for a framework for collaboration between artists and presenters, as well as an equally clear constituency. The toolkit is more than list of best practices, despite its pragmatic underpinnings. Some of its guiding principles will be to convey the need for close collaboration and communication between the artist, producer, and community; the notion that, as Borrup argues all communities have assets, it is just a matter of identifying them; finally that this work takes time. It is the hope that this this toolkit will convey to presenters that is possible to do this work in any community with almost any resource structure.

Fellow *Served* collaborator, Krissie Marty of Forklift Danceworks, considers the toolkit to also be a "philosophy" (Interview). She is referring to the toolkit and to the community-based practice. Just as a community-based practice is hyphenated in nature, a partnership of sorts, so this toolkit is advocating for a similar hyphenation as part of the creative process. The artist and presenter in dialogue with the community, must work together at all stages of the process for success. Each needs the talents, resources, and creativity of the other. Both sets of perspectives are brought to bear in all aspects of the creative process. Reimagining the artist and presenter relationship from this new perspective also reimagines how the project is conceived, built, and executed: both parties bring critical insight. It is with this combined insight that expectations for the project are best managed. Stakeholders such as funders, both internal and external to the academic system, community leaders, and participants need to understand that community-based work takes a massive time commitment as well as complex resources. Aaron Landsman refers to this as "lead[ing] graciously" (Interview). As with Marty, he is referring to both working with the community to make the project as well gathering the resources. The artist

must take time to allow for the many perspectives needed to shape the project. It is only with time that relationship building can happen in a meaningful way.

Community-based practice represents an epistemological shift in aesthetics; the source of art can come from within the community it is serving as opposed to solely from the “artist expert”. This thesis argues for the same shift in the presenting model. This toolkit, which represents the physical manifestation of this thesis, is a practical and philosophical framework to engage and enhance that shift on college and university campuses.

## Conclusion

When Sandra Burton created a dance performance in a Williams College gymnasium for students and community members she was engaging in an arts-centered project. She saw a need, then brought together diverse parts of the community to respond to the need. Part of what made Burton's work so compelling was that she mindfully brought together two very different groups to find common ground through dance. One group was young adults from an elite, private college. The other group was community members, many of whom will never have the social or economic advantages that the former group had open to them. Both groups have a need for self-actualization. Through this act of creating an arts-centered project, she created a new community out of the two. This new community was very much in line with the Alternate ROOTS definition of community referenced in chapter one, "the creation and presentation of original art that is rooted in community, place, tradition or spirit" (ROOTS). This new community not only became a way for mutual support but also offered the possibility for social and class barriers to be crossed. This was community engagement at its finest. If the Williams College "W" on that floor was symbolic of the walls conveyed by an exclusive institution set in a socially and economically depressed region, Burton did all she could to erase it.

*Served* is a direct descendant of Burton's work. Not only is it building off of the precedent Burton created, but it is also attempting to reimagine community through an arts-centered project in a community where this type of work is the exception, not the rule. It is valuable to take a moment to elaborate on why this work is the exception in Williamstown as way to underscore the need for more community arts projects such as *Served*.



Interviews with faculty members in the performing arts at Williams College, each with decades of tenure, confirm that the culture at Williams does not encourage a community arts practice (Anon faculty 1). This cultural inertia is so strong that one member of the faculty expressed embarrassment when asked to describe their community engagement projects. This professor has not initiated any community-based projects throughout decades at Williams (Anon faculty 2). This is remarkable because, prior to arriving at Williams, this professor helped to establish a well-regarded performing arts ensemble dedicated to responding to human rights issues.

This cultural inertia highlights how critical it is that the methodology and implementation of *Served* be mindful of not succumbing to "business as usual." *Served*, as a residency and performance project, is not an artist coming into a community to impose a preset rubric. Rather, it is the opposite. *Served* is a vehicle for community conversation first, intending to humanize a community, not objectify them. This is an artistic practice modified to explore class and privilege. It will be from this point that the performance work will be built, always keeping in mind the concerns of the food service workers. As we have heard, there are concerns about respect and privacy. As with *Trash Project*, for example, no one will be required to participate and all those who do will be paid for their time. Just as Don Anderson went from skeptic to being the project's most vocal advocate, *Served* will be built from within the community it is seeking to support.

Williams College and Williamstown have a deep, long-standing commitment to arts and culture. There are two world-class visual arts museums within the town borders, Williams College Museum of Art and The Clark (the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute). The '62 Center for Theatre and Dance (CTD) presents over 65 lectures, theater,

and dance performances in its three theaters during non-summer months. The Tony Award winning Williamstown Theater Festival and Williams College Summer Theatre Lab take over those spaces during the summer months, which is the tourist season. The Berkshire Symphony also calls Williamstown its home. These are all valuable artistic endeavors. What they all have in common is the Euro-centric focus discussed in chapters one and three. They are all infrastructures dedicated to one cultural milieu, which, as a result, act as a strong social and symbolic barrier to the parts of the community without a predisposition for this cultural framework. As we have seen, not only does that cultural framework speak to a diminishing percentage of the population but it also disenfranchises large portions of the community by restricting access to social capital. It is for this reason that some members of the community feel that the CTD represents a failure for the town.

Sandra Burton's work, while still a community beacon, is centered within the boundaries of the CTD; the exterior needs she saw are still pertinent and urgent. Taking her work as an inspiration, *Served* is designed, with its three component parts (the Williams performance, the business model, and the toolkit), to take that inspiration to reimagine community-based arts engagement in Williamstown and beyond. Starting from Burton's bringing communities together, *Served* moves beyond community-engagement to socially engaged art by addressing issues such as class and privilege head-on. Socially engaged art projects such as *Served* act as a form of cultural expression by answering the question: what is important to us as a community? College and university campuses by definition are places to ask questions, challenge assumptions, and look for new solutions. *Served's* intention is to engage directly with this ethos at Williams and on campuses across the

country to show how the performing arts can not only speak to but also respond to some of the most challenging concerns in our society.

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## Interviews

Anonymous Food Service 1. 14 May 2016. Williams College Dining Services employee.

Anonymous Food Service 2. 14 May 2016. Williams College Dining Services employee.

Anonymous Food Service 3. 14 May 2016. Williams College Dining Services employee.

Anonymous Faculty 1. 10 April 2016. Williams College Faculty.

Anonymous Faculty 2. 12 Oct 2016. Williams College Faculty.

Alcombright, Richard J. 25 February 2016. Mayor, North Adams, MA.

Baff, Ella. 3 November. Former Artistic and Executive Director of Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.

Burton, Sandra. 7 October 2015. Lipp Family Director of Dance and Senior Lecturer in Dance, Williams College.

DiMuro, Peter. 12 Aug. 2015. Executive Director, Dance Complex, Boston, MA. Artistic Director of Liz Lerman Dance Exchange 2003-2008.

Eppel, David. 12 October 2015. Williams College Professor of Theatre, former chair.

Killam, Sue. 21 October 2015. Managing Director, Mass MoCA, North Adams, MA.

Landsman, Aaron. 1 April 2016. Artist.

Lerman, Liz. 7 April 2016. Artist.

Marty, Krissie. 4 April 2016. Associate Choreographer & Director of Education, Forklift Danceworks.

Orlove, Michael. 6 October 2015. Artist Communities, Presenting & Multidisciplinary Works Director, International Activities Coordinator, National Endowment for the Arts.

Orr, Allison. 16 Nov. 2015. Founder and Artistic Director of Forklift Danceworks.

Schaffer Bacon, Barbara. 28 October 2015. Co-Director Animating Democracy.

Secor, Jonathan. 23 October 2015. Director, Berkshire Cultural Resource Center,  
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA).

Sonntag, Douglas. 2 October 2015. Director of Dance, Interim Director of Theater & Musical  
Theater, National Endowment for the Arts.

Sweeney, Jessica. 18 February 2016. Co-founder and Creative Director, Common Folk Artist  
Collective, North Adams, MA.

Watts, Emily C. 25 February 2016. Executive Director, Williamstown Chamber of  
Commerce.