

SOJOURN THEATRE COMPANY: A CASE STUDY IN
COMMUNITY-BASED THEATRE

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Sojourn Theatre Company: A Case Study in Community-Based Theatre

This thesis examines contemporary community-based theatre processes and efficacy through a case study of Sojourn Theatre Company. Chapter II overviews Sojourn's production history and explores the company's style. Chapter III discusses the theatre-making process, from project conceptualization to performance. Chapter IV examines approaches for assessing Sojourn's efficacy. The research was based on company interviews, primary observation, archive materials, and audience reviews. The results of the study indicate that Sojourn relies heavily on audience engagement and community participation to assess its work. In addition, both a production's purpose and its target audience play a large role in determining efficacy.

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For my family.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Like many artists, I struggle with the question of how to create meaningful and successful theatre. Indeed, each artist, each collaborative group, or company must define “meaning” and “success” for themselves. There are many possible purposes for artistic work. Any measure of efficacy has as much to do with an artistic work’s purpose as it does with its methods. My own search to self-define success and meaning is rooted in the values and methods of community-based performance. As a Playback Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed practitioner, creating art collaboratively with non-artist community members has always inspired me, particularly when the work promotes social justice. Many of my most moving moments as a spectator have occurred while watching community-based performance about social justice issues central to that community. The collaborative partnership between artist(s) and community is precisely what intrigues me most about community-based work.

Debates in the field raise several questions about the diverse parameters and purposes of community-based art. For example, does a company’s definition of community influence their theatre-making process? How do the barometers for meaning and success change depending upon that definition? In a field struggling to define itself, I suspect that the answers to these questions vary from group to group. Many companies (including community-based ensembles) define themselves by and through their particular technique; others define themselves by the issues they address or communities they serve.

As the field of community-based performance has grown, scholarship in the form of studies of individual artists and companies has also burgeoned. For example, Sonja Kuflinec's case-study of Cornerstone Theatre, *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-Based Theater*, and Jan Cohen-Cruz's book *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*. While much of the scholarship documents accomplishments, group dynamics, and theory, little of the scholarship documents the theatre-making process of contemporary community-based ensembles. In this study I will examine a contemporary ensemble-based theatre company, Sojourn Theatre, investigating and documenting how Sojourn creates productions to discover how they define and measure success. How does Sojourn create its productions and what challenges does the company face? What methods are successful and how do the artists and their community collaborators define their artistic, practical, and sociopolitical efficacy?

Sojourn has emerged as a leader in the contested field of community-based theatre, and its work is at the center of many of the debates in the field. Although much of the company's earlier work fits within the realm of community-based performance, its current work deviates significantly from the ambiguous boundaries drawn by scholars and other practitioners, who disagree about what constitutes community-based performance. A lack of consensus among community-based practitioners complicates any attempt to define the field and where Sojourn's work fits within it. At the same time, an analysis of Sojourn's work and how the company situates itself within these debates can help illuminate and perhaps clarify aspects of this emergent field.

In her book *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*, Jan Cohen-Cruz defines community-based performance as “a collaboration between an artist or ensemble and a ‘community’” where the artist or ensemble draws the sources for material from a community of people and generates the work in collaboration with that community (2). Theatre scholars wrestle with the problematic term ‘community,’ with its long sociological history fraught with mutability and imprecision. Cohen-Cruz defines community as a group of people who share some identity or experience, such as “place, ethnicity, class, race, sexual preference, profession, circumstances, or political orientation” (2). However, Cohen-Cruz cautions against treating community categories as “fixed, biologically determined entities” when they are in fact fluid (3). Bill Rauch, co-founder of Cornerstone Theatre, embraces this fluidity stating, “all art is community-based” (“Artist in the Community”). One of Cornerstone’s goals is to extend its definition of community to include “[whoever] wants to work with [Cornerstone] and what excites the artists within the company” (Kuftinec et al 126). By using a wide variety of parameters to define the communities with which it collaborates, Cornerstone increases the scope of the community to which the company belongs.

In comparison, Sojourn members speak of community in terms of the entities involved in a project, such as stakeholders, affinity groups, and geographical locations (Rohd, Personal Interview). In addition, for company members, defining personal community is an integral part of Sojourn’s process. Company member Liam-Kaas Lentz reports that the company:

talk[s] a lot about... how we define our own community. Is it our household, is it families, is it our block, is it our neighborhood, is it our city, is it our state? Where do those concentric circles of community solidify for [us]?

(Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz)

Similar to Cornerstone, Sojourn chooses what group, cause, or demographic it wants to learn from and engage with, and creates its productions in partnership with entities that will support those aims. Both Sojourn and Cornerstone's definitions of community enable the companies to expand the kind of work they do and with whom they do it. Their flexible definition of community allows them to discover and shape their relationship to a particular group in the process of the work itself.

Not all practitioners agree with this broad, flexible definition of community; some find it hazardous. In a 1993 report on the field, Dudley Cocke, Harry Newman, and Janet Salmons-Rue caution against ambiguous and vague terminology, reflecting that "there is no longer a single, shared understanding of what community means" (13). They prefer the term "grassroots theater" over "community-based theatre." While Cocke, Newman, And Salmons-Rue find the term 'grassroots' to be more specific, Haedicke and Nellhaus find 'grassroots' to be just as vague a term as community, asking "Just who is and who isn't part of the grassroots?" (11). Haedicke and Nellhaus also acknowledge the fluidity of the concept of community, and rather than seek rigid boundaries defining the term, they embrace its fluid nature as a resource rather than an obstacle (12). In Petra Kuppers and Gwen Robertson's *The Community Performance Reader*, the authors prefer the term 'community performance' in place of community-based performance, broadly stating,

“community performance involves a set of attitudes or precepts more than anything else” (2). However, ‘community performance’ bears a striking resemblance to ‘community theater,’ which in the United States, refers to amateur theatre. In England and Australia, however, community-based theatre is commonly called ‘community theater’ (Haedicke and Nellhaus 11).

In addition to the problematic term ‘community,’ scholars and practitioners disagree regarding level of community participation. What level of involvement do community members need to have in order for a project to ‘count’ as community-based theatre? Some companies define community-based projects by the use of non-actors as performers in the final production. This is usually not the case for Sojourn Theatre, which is one reason it veers away from the label ‘community-based’ (Rohd, Personal Interview). Other practitioners contend that a project is community-based if the material for the project is drawn from an existing community and engages that community’s concerns, regardless of whether or not community members perform in the production (Weinberg 24; Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts* 2). Still others give no definitive opinion, merely acknowledging the diverse approaches of community-based technique (Haedicke and Nellhaus; Kupperts and Robertson). Regardless of the presence of community actors on stage, the degree of community participation falls on a wide spectrum.

Company descriptions increase the array of identifiers further. Sojourn prefers the term “community-engaged” to describe much of its work, feeling that community-based implies the use of community members as actors in the production (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz; Rohd, Personal Interview). Junebug artistic

director John O’Neil describes his theater company as “transformational theater” and “character-based storytelling” (Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts* 62). Many companies shy away from labels, choosing instead to define themselves through descriptions of their work and thereby avoiding misinterpretation and misleading classification. For example, Roadside Theatre self-defines as an “indigenous ensemble” that “explore[s] how drama... contributes to democracy and to the health of communities in Appalachia and away” (Cocke, “2010 Director’s Statement”). Cornerstone describes itself as a “multi-ethnic, ensemble-based theater company” that “builds bridges between and within diverse communities” by “combin[ing] the artistry of professional and community collaborators” (Cornerstone Theater Company). In addition, many companies experience shifts throughout their history and sometimes have multiple styles that do or do not fit into a clear definition of community-based theatre. For example, many of Sojourn’s earlier projects were more clearly community-based, while later projects veer away from community-based art toward experimental participatory theatre. The diverse production histories of community-based ensembles highlight the dilemma inherent in any attempt to narrowly define the form.

Haedicke and Nellhaus help sort these preferences and disagreements in terms by offering three parameters for community-based theatre. Most companies, they claim, either adapt or redefine existing texts, utilize nontraditional script writing techniques, “blur the boundaries between actor and spectator” through “participatory performance techniques,” or some combination of the three (3). Many community-based companies’ techniques cross these categories multiple times over

the course of their production history and sometimes within a single production. For example, Sojourn theatre began by redefining text, adapting such classics as Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* and Moliere's *Tartuffe* while concurrently exploring interview-based work. The company then began to focus on site-specific theatre and audience participation, while also drawing heavily on interview-based research to develop scripts. Currently, Sojourn often combines techniques, such as in its site-specific production *Finding Penelope*, a rewriting of a section of Homer's *Odyssey*, developed collaboratively with a continuing care retirement community (Carpenter). In addition to adapting a classical text and utilizing residents as actors, *Finding Penelope* dramatically blurred the spectator/actor relationship (*Finding Penelope*). The journey-based show took audience members through the halls of the care facility in which the show was set, integrating the facility's staff into the show to such a degree that one audience member pondered, "Who are the actors and who the staff?" (Eaton). While many community-based productions do not fall clearly and neatly into Nellhaus and Haedicke's categories, their parameters provide a useful framework of techniques through which to examine community-based theatre.

One defining characteristic of community-based theatre lies in its emphasis on portraying voices not adequately represented in mainstream culture. Rather than categorize community-based theatre through technique, Cocke, Newman, and Salmons-Rue emphasize this purpose, stating grassroots theater is "a theater that comes from and serves those with the least power in...society" and whose goal "is to preserve and express the values of those without privilege" (13). Expressing

unprivileged views is a common purpose among practitioners. Sojourn emphasizes its commitment to “voice that which is usually unvoiced” and demonstrates consistent attention to this tenet (Rohd, qtd. in Wood 18). Jump-Start Performance company “was founded to create and support new work by artists from underserved communities” (Leonard and Kilkelly 112), and “is committed to a ‘diversity of under-heard voices’” (Jump-Start qtd. in Cohen-Cruz, Introduction 9).

In addition to focusing on the field’s purpose, Cocke, Newman, and Salmons-Rue emphasize the locality of grassroots theatre stating it “grows out of a commitment to place... grounded in the local and the specific” (81). Haedicke and Nellhaus likewise reflect a commitment to localism, reporting that many community-based projects “seek to explore issues of immediate concern to the residents of a specific locale” (4). But what counts as ‘commitment to place’? While at the time of publication, Cocke, Newman, and Salmons-Rue may have referred to developing work close to home, for many years Cocke’s Roadside Theater “collaborate[d] on projects beyond its Appalachian home” and toured its shows nationally (Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts* 73). Indeed, many community-based companies work with communities outside their hometowns and begin their process by identifying and then entering a community with which they would like to work. Perhaps identity is “more dynamic than rooted, exemplified in movement rather than locality” (Kuftinec, *Staging America* 6). Sonja Kuftinec underscores the field’s emphasis on “grounding identity through group building and mythmaking” (Kuftinec, *Staging America* 6). The ability of community-based work to build community through the theatrical process highlights a deviation from community-

based work tied to one specific locale. While some of Sojourn's earlier productions entailed entering and working with established communities to which they did not belong, Sojourn's current work seeks to build community through "mak[ing] experiences during which strangers connect with each other" (Rohd, "Civic Theater: Part 2"). Community identity extends beyond the boundaries of place and theatre-making builds new communities.

In this study I use a broad definition of community-based theatre. Mark Weinberg, of the Center for Applied Theatre in Milwaukee, defines community-based theatre as:

Theatre that closely allies itself with a particular community, develops performances about that community's concerns, and involves some level of participation from community members ranging from serving as interview subjects for story gathering to performing onstage.

(24)

While specific in its description, Weinberg's definition allows for a large degree of flexibility. He does not define the term 'community,' and his definition provides a broad range of community member participation. For the purposes of this study I use the term 'community' to mean any group of people with any common experience, whether that experience is the theatrical event itself or some sociological common ground. This broad use of the term allows for an expansive lens through which to view theatrical work that might not normally be included in the term 'community-based.'

Emerging out of the discourse of community-based theatre are other useful terms such as 'civic theater' and 'citizen artist.' Community-based theatre "bring[s] less frequently heard narratives into the public arena;" civic theater takes this a step further by utilizing theatre to engage constituents in dialogue and problem solving on public issues (Rohd, "Civic Theater: Part 2"). Citizen artists, as participants and facilitators in civic theater, are invested in the public to such a degree "that they no longer [view] the public from the outside, but rather are an integral part of that public" (Durland xxiii). The citizen artist "is at the energetic center of the community, not attached prescriptively at its edges" (Burnham 184) and creates art that directly reflects "the particular culture in which it was created" (Durland xxiii). By acknowledging and participating as part of the public, the citizen "artist is invested in the public" and "the public is invested in art" (Durland xxiii). Sojourn's artistic director Michael Rohd defines civic theater as a theatre that "utilize[s] artistic practice... as assets of meaning-making and collaboration" within public process (Rohd, "Civic Theater: Part 2"). Rohd coined the term civic theater, as he uses it, to help differentiate the work he and Sojourn are doing from other community-based practices (Rohd, Personal Interview). Rohd uses the word civic "in relation to its non-arts-based connotation," meaning "civic as legislative or discourse related," and policy related (Rohd, Personal Interview), as opposed to the often oppressive and Americanizing practices of the civic theater movement in the early twentieth century (Kuftinec, *Staging America* 26-30). Rohd's vision of civic theater has more to do with blurring the lines between theatre and public life, adhering to Durland's description of the citizen artist. By viewing the American

public as the broad community within which they work, Sojourn's civic-engaged theatre seeks to ground itself within the public sector, creating theatre that moves civic issues forward through its participatory and dialogical techniques.

At the center of these debates is a clear consensus that community-based performance seeks to engage with an audience-community in ways that deviate from a conventional theatre (i.e. commercial or nonprofit) actor-spectator relationship and from the traditional ways in which theatre is made and produced. Traditionally, theatre consists of actors on a stage performing for a passive audience. The audience's role is to witness, rather than interact, and while spectators may engage with the material intellectually, they do not, typically, leave their seats. In addition, in conventional theatre, the audience has no involvement in production creation; their participation begins when the curtain rises. In community-based theatre spectators are often asked for more. For example, in Sojourn's 2008 production of *BUILT*, the actors polled audience members during the production and the answers to their questions then became a part of that night's production (Martinez). Cocke's Roadside Theater creates collaborative productions with individual communities, expanding the traditional audience role of passive witness to engaged collaborator (Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts* 65). The Ukiah Players based their production of *UpRooted* on community member interviews and rewrote their original production in response to audience feedback (Paterson, "UpRooted"). Community-based practitioners challenge the traditional separation between actor and spectator, and value audience members as critical contributors both during the theatre-making process and the performance.

For the purposes of this study, I will use the term ‘community-engaged’ to describe Sojourn’s work. My reasons for doing this are twofold. First, ‘engaged’ provides a wider lens through which to view productions; the word ‘based’ implies a greater degree of community participation in the actual devising process than many of Sojourn’s productions entailed. Second, the term ‘engaged’ more accurately describes the interactive nature of Sojourn’s productions and I find the word ‘based’ to be vague and misleading.

This Study: Sojourn Theatre Company

Both in purpose and methods Sojourn’s work complicates these debates in ways that can help us understand how theatre functions in civic society, regardless of what terms may be used to describe that function. This study proposes to capture a piece of important theatre history, highlighting Sojourn’s inheritance from the community-based performance practitioners of the 1960s and 1970s and articulating current practices in the field. In addition, exploring how Sojourn has developed will provide other companies an invaluable example of the inner-workings of a community-engaged company, offering guidance for current and future community-engaged artists through documenting a present day example. Finally, investigating Sojourn’s production processes and measures of success will further my own creative process and clarify my values as a community-engaged artist.

Sojourn Theatre’s work spans several genres over the course of the company’s history, including community-engaged performance, devised performance, and civic theater. While its work can be discussed within a variety of

different frames, this study seeks to consider them within the frame of community-engaged performance¹. Sojourn Theatre is one of the leading contemporary ensemble-based companies in the United States. As the recipient of numerous awards, including participation in the Exemplar Program and the Animating Democracy project, the company has gained national recognition through its approach for merging theatre and civic engagement (Sojourn Theatre, “About Us”). In 2005 the Ford Foundation/America for the Arts recognized them as “leaders in community and civic engagement” (Sojourn Theatre, “About Us”). Artistic Director Michael Rohd collaborated extensively with renowned theatre artist Ping Chong between 1998 and 2005 and these collaborations have further contributed to both his and the company’s reputation (Elliot; Rohd, “So”). Yet, little scholarly writing about Rohd or the company exists. While local theatre reviewers have written numerous performance reviews across the country, and there are references to their work in *American Theatre Magazine*, scholars have not written about Sojourn’s history, efficacy, or methodology.

In the following chapters I frame Sojourn’s methods through the lens of three of the questions discussed earlier: How does Sojourn create its productions? What types of methods are successful and how do Sojourn and its community collaborators define a production’s artistic, practical, and sociopolitical efficacy? I begin by looking at Sojourn’s production history (Chapter II), discussing Sojourn’s productions in terms of the arc of Sojourn’s shifts and development. In Chapter III, I

¹ Devising is one of the primary methods Sojourn utilizes to generate its work. A study framing the company from this perspective would be equally valuable. For more information on devising, please see *Devising Performance* by Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling.

explore Sojourn's creative process in order to parse out its varied modes of working. In Chapter IV, I discuss what success means to this company, and what barometers its members have in place for assessment. Finally, in Chapter V, I conclude that the efficacy of Sojourn's productions is intricately related to aesthetics, target audience, and the degree of audience and community engagement.

Sojourn and Michael Rohd have influenced my own growth as a community-engaged practitioner. Although I have studied under Rohd and am an admirer of both he and Sojourn, I hope to present an objective assessment. However, this project does not seek to critically analyze Sojourn's theatre-making process, nor measure the degree of Sojourn's efficacy. Rather, I seek to describe Sojourn's process and outline the ways in which the company assesses its own efficacy. In addition, this study is not intended as a complete history of Sojourn, but hopes to lay some groundwork on which others can build. Through examining the practices and efficacy of Sojourn's work, as the company defines it, I hope to inspire further research both about Sojourn and the growing field of community-engaged performance.

CHAPTER II

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Sojourn Theatre Company: A Brief History

Sojourn Theatre Company was founded by Michael Rohd in 1999 in Blacksburg, Virginia while Rohd was working on an MFA in Directing at Virginia Tech (Rohd, Personal Interview). In 2001, Rohd moved the company to Portland, Oregon. Rohd had lived in the Northwest in the 1990s, and felt Portland was a place where the company “could make a niche for [itself]” as there were no other “ensemble-based, community-based, non-traditional” companies at the time in the city (Burke). Sojourn was based in Portland until 2007, at which point Rohd accepted a teaching position at Northwestern University where he currently teaches (Hallett, “Changes”). Although the company used Portland as a home-base for the first several years after Rohd’s move to Chicago, many of the company members are currently spread throughout the U.S., and recently the company has focused on creating work in places other than the Pacific Northwest.

Much of what Sojourn grew to become arose out of a particular moment in history—a moment in which the arts were gaining recognition as a viable approach for addressing social ills. The community-based theatre practitioners of the 1960s and 1970s such as Luis Valdez, Augusto Boal, and John O’Neal, paved the way for many of the artists and ensembles that came of age in the 1980s, including Cornerstone Theatre and Looking Glass Theatre. As an artist coming of age in the 1980s and 1990s, Rohd worked with both of these groundbreaking companies,

learning their grassroots methods firsthand, and Sojourn's genesis and Rohd's own journey as a young artist/activist are intertwined.

While earning his undergraduate degree at Northwestern University, Rohd was influenced by dance scholar Lynne Blom's improvisational structures. Blom, a professor at Northwestern, worked in long form physical composition (pre-Viewpoints²) and her open structures informed Sojourn's early work, particularly when generating from a non-narrative starting point (Rohd, "Re: Follow"). Soon after graduating from Northwestern in 1989, Rohd worked with Jim Dennen's improvisational company ED, and the company's approach to long form improvisation also influenced Rohd (Rohd, "Re: Follow"). Between 1989 and 1991, Rohd performed, wrote, and directed in Chicago as well as toured the country with the Missoula Children's Theatre (Rohd, "So"). Rohd also worked with Bill Rauch at Cornerstone Theatre in Boston and Washington D.C. during this time, and traveled to Europe where he was influenced by the highly physical, nonlinear theatre he saw there (Rohd, "Re: Follow"). In 1991 Rohd accepted a teaching position at the Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C. (Rohd, "Re: Interview"; Burke). While in D.C., Rohd began an interactive educational theatre program in response to the AIDS crisis (Rohd "Re: Thought;" Paterson, Forward xi). The program, Hope Is Vital, utilized interactive theatre to give youth a safe space to dialogue about HIV and AIDS, and other issues relevant to their lives (Paterson, Forward xvi). Rohd left Washington D.C. in 1993 and traveled across the country to assist other communities in developing similar programs (Rohd, "Re: Interview"). In 1995 Rohd

² Viewpoints is a composition technique developed by Mary Overlie. For more information, see Overlie's website: www.sixviewpoints.com.

met theatre revolutionary Augusto Boal and was influenced by Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed practice (Paterson, Forward xi). Boal's work informed the methods Rohd was exploring with Hope Is Vital, and Rohd eventually wrote an interactive theatre handbook on this methodology, "Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue" published in 1998. Although Rohd's work bears little resemblance to formal Theatre of the Oppressed structures, according to Rohd "encountering [Theatre of the Oppressed] has been a portal on the way to becoming the artist, educator, and community worker" he is now (Rohd, Foreword viii). Rohd's commitment to theatre as a method of dialogue and civic engagement has its roots in these beginning influences and although the format of Sojourn's performances deviates radically from the work Rohd conducted with Hope Is Vital, much of Sojourn's work reflects the values behind it.

In 1997 Rohd entered Virginia Tech's MFA program under the tutelage of former Road Company artistic director Robert Leonard. As a founding member of Alternative ROOTS and the Network for Ensemble Theatre Festival, Leonard had strong ties to the community-based theatre circuit. According to Leonard, Rohd had a strong vision upon entering the program: "When Michael came in, it was absolutely crystal clear that he had a specific intention—he wanted to have a company, an ensemble. And that intention became the glue for the work that we did together" (qtd. in Pincus-Roth). Part of Rohd's desire to form an ensemble came from work he had done with Cornerstone Theatre and Looking Glass Theatre during the companies' early years, but "neither of [those companies] felt like...home" (Rohd, Personal Interview). Leonard guided Rohd to other mentors, including

theatre artist Ping Chong, whom Rohd collaborated with extensively over a period of seven years (Rohd, "So"). In addition, Leonard encouraged Rohd's interest in movement theatre, insisting that Rohd establish a consistent movement exploration practice, planting seeds for what would become Sojourn's highly physical style (Pincus-Roth). During his second year in the program, Rohd began working with a group of students with whom he felt especially connected, but was still uncertain as to whether he would form an ensemble (Rohd, Personal Interview). In the middle of his third year of the program, Rohd saw a production by a company he greatly respected, Theatre de la Jeune Lune, based in Minneapolis (Rohd, Personal Interview). After the performance, Rohd realized he was at a point where he could make "work of that caliber" and went back to the students with whom he had been working at Virginia Tech to formally begin Sojourn as a company (Rohd, Personal Interview).

Many of the founding members of Sojourn first came together in 1999 with the production *Wish the Moon, Swallow the Whole Hot Sun* held at Virginia Tech. The production explored "the relationship between history, social forces, and personal story" (Sojourn Theatre, "1999"). Since its inception in 1999, the company has created and performed 22 major works, as well as drawn national attention for its approach to civic engagement. While Rohd usually acts as writer and director, most of Sojourn's productions are created collaboratively, with Rohd guiding the process (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). Rohd and the company focus heavily on the *process* of theatre-making, while maintaining a vision of high aesthetics for the final product. Material is often still in development right up until opening, and productions

frequently change throughout a run to adapt to new discoveries and audience needs (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz; Rohd, Personal Interview).

Production History

While its original mission of producing “politically inquisitive, history-conscious, community-engaged, and strikingly physical” theatre remains intact, Sojourn has grown and matured as a company and its methods and values have shifted throughout the company’s history (Rohd, Personal Interview). This development has not been a linear one. Several key transitions have taken place surrounding the company’s generative process, the level of audience participation, and, to a lesser extent, Sojourn’s use of existing texts. In the pages that follow, I describe some of Sojourn’s major works and how they demonstrate these shifts.

Capturing Sojourn’s work through words on a page is difficult, as words cannot accurately reflect its depth and complexity. The company’s physical style incorporates choreography, sound, images, and, particularly in their later work, multi-media. I have seen two Sojourn productions, participated in one of Rohd’s training workshops, and observed development of their current production, *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)*; however, the company’s work is so diverse that I also depend on video³, interviews, reviews, and scripts. As with any scholarship that involves researching nontraditional theatre companies, my sources are limited to those materials I had access to. The reader will notice I rely heavily on newspaper reviews; this is in large part due to their accessibility. However, newspaper

³ For many of Sojourn’s productions, particularly earlier productions, video footage does not exist. Although the company archive contains some footage of later productions, I did not have access to these.

reviewers typically write from a traditional theatre context, emphasizing a set of standards that have little to do with the purposes of much of Sojourn's work. In addition, I have also included sources from blogs. Though not normally included in scholarship, blogs provide a firsthand account of audience member experience, and can aid in better understanding a production. Yet, both bloggers and reviewers often have strong personal opinions that are not informed by scholarship or theory; thus their perspectives must be treated with caution. I include these sources as a means of gaining information about Sojourn's productions and am in no way implying that bloggers or newspaper reviewers are experts in the field of community-engaged theatre, or theatre in general.

What follows is not a comprehensive history of Sojourn's work, but rather an overview of the company's style and values through the lens of specific productions that reflect how those works shaped Sojourn's ever-changing process. I have chosen productions that highlight key aspects of Sojourn's work; however, it is important to note that many of the productions' processes overlap. A production history timeline of Sojourn's mainstage productions can be found in the Appendix.

Adaptations/Retellings of Existing Texts

Three of Sojourn's early productions, *Wish the Moon*, *Swallow the Whole Hot Sun*; *Rhinoceros*; and *Tartuffe: The Visitor*, made use of adapted texts. Later adaptations include *The Visit*, *Good*, and *Finding Penelope*. Sojourn utilizes adaptations to revitalize classic stories, and incorporates contemporary themes to focus on particular social issues relevant to audiences. In some cases, the company relied heavily on the original text; in others, the company and/or Rohd wrote and

devised an adaptation that deviated significantly from the source. Much of Sojourn's earlier work reflects the former, while their later work used original texts merely as a starting point. Below I describe *Tartuffe: The Visitor* and *The Visit* to highlight Sojourn's shift from traditional adaptation to devised retelling.

***Tartuffe: The Visitor* (2001); Portland, OR**

Rohd originally conceived *Tartuffe: The Visitor* as a show exploring themes of sex and power through an adaptation of Moliere's classic text (Howard, Personal Interview). However, this original intent shifted when the terrorist attack on New York City destroyed its twin towers on September 11, 2001. When rehearsal began two weeks later, the show took a decidedly different turn (Howard, Personal Interview). Rohd made time in rehearsal for the cast to dialogue about the event, wanting to honor its presence in the room, and while there were no overt references to September 11th in the final production, according to company member Kimberly Howard, the event's presence was palpable (Howard, Personal Interview). In a surprising turn of events, perhaps reflecting the state of mistrust in 2001 America, the production ended with the ensemble circling around Tartuffe and stabbing him to death (Howard, Personal Interview). A five to six second lag in applause following the show's ending conveyed the audience's uncertainty regarding appropriate response (Howard, Personal Interview) and spoke to the immediacy of Sojourn's rendition of this classic.

While Sojourn's later adaptations deviated significantly from the source text/story, the company largely kept to a trimmed down version of Moliere's text, retaining the original iambic pentameter verse and wearing period costumes

(Howard, Personal Interview). However, the company incorporated physical movement and gesture in and around the text, creating a production Howard describes as “one of our more beautiful shows” with cast members rolling around on stage, riding on each other’s shoulders, and other physical exchanges (Howard, Personal Interview). By exploring “the power of irrational belief and hypocrisy” through a highly physical style, Sojourn revitalized *Tartuffe*, creating a relevant and current exploration of “religion, hypocrisy, fanaticism...and violence” (Lesleylad).

***The Visit* (2005); Portland, OR**

Sojourn’s adaptation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s classic, *The Visit*, led audience members through a journey-based site-specific show staged at a local Portland high school (Nguyen). Their first adaptation since the 2001 production of *Tartuffe*, *The Visit* provided audiences with “an incredible sensory world” including trapeze, dance, “eerily lit corridors” (Sanders, “The Visit”) through which the audience had to travel, and a “scene [that] took place with the audience facing a wall of mirrors in a dance studio, the actors sitting among” the audience (Eschright).

Unlike *Tartuffe: The Visitor*, Rohd and Sojourn largely rewrote Dürrenmatt’s text, much to one critic’s dismay. Reviewer Justin Sanders felt the company’s interpretation fell flat, “gutting the playwright’s darkly witty banter and surreal physical details in favor of a somber visual/verbal dance” (Sanders, “The Visit”). According to Sanders, the “blatant disregard of [the production’s] source material” detracted from the show, “wringing it of humor and vibrancy to prove some mysterious point” (Sanders, “The Visit”). However, Sanders has a record of negative Sojourn reviews and not all audience members agreed. Other audience members

described the play as “terrifyingly relevant” with impressive staging and sensory techniques (Silva; Eschright). In any case, while Sojourn’s script follows the basic storyline of Dürrenmatt’s play, as noted by Sanders, the language is completely different and reflects a work re-written by Rohd, partially based on the improvising that occurred during the devising process.

Interview-Based Poetic Documentaries

While many of Sojourn’s projects have elements of documentary theatre, the following two productions highlight the use of non-narrative poetic documentary. The first example, *The Justice Project*, reflects an early attempt at this style. Critics felt that although the production contained compelling elements it was not entirely successful in its cohesion, although this may reflect a lack of exposure to non-plot driven productions, since the production was not dramaturgically aimed at narrative. A later production, *The War Project*, displays a second example of this style of Sojourn’s work and contained even less narrative than *The Justice Project*.

The Justice Project: I Am Not Now Who I Might Have Been (2001); Portland, OR

Sojourn began exploring interview-based documentary theatre with their second and third productions, 2000’s *Look Away* and 2001’s *Cities on a Hill*. *Look Away* explored themes of hatred, violence, and alienation among high school youth (Howell; Sojourn Theatre, “2000”) while *Cities on a Hill* investigated “the history of Asian immigration and the American Dream in the Pacific Northwest” (Sojourn Theatre, “2001”). Sojourn continued its exploration of interview-based theatre with *The Justice Project*. Set in a historic downtown courthouse, *The Justice Project* explored themes related to justice in Portland through “vignettes, monologues and

movement interludes,” which “splendidly integrated” “movement and speech” (Wattenberg, “Justice Project”). The 90-minute show was generally well received, with several critiques about the length and focus of the show (Silvis; Wattenberg, “Justice Project”). Critics felt the show tried to cover too much ground in the piece, commenting, “the broad range of concerns threatens to undermine the play’s coherence” (Wattenberg, “Justice Project”).

Rohd and company developed the show after spending four months interviewing a wide range of Portlanders including judges, police officers, religious leaders, community activists, attorneys, prison inmates, and incarcerated youth (Polo). The episodic production strove to “balance opposing points of view as well as [present] a social critique of [the] current system of justice” (Rohd, qtd. in Polo). Sojourn integrated projected images, sound, and choreography (Sanders, “The Justice Project”). As their first site-specific show, the cast created unique physical vignettes around the existing space “[standing] barefooted on the judge’s bench, gleefully [hurdling] jury seats, and [lounging] with their feet up on the witness stand” (Sanders, “The Justice Project”).

The script illuminates an example of Sojourn’s use of alternating dialogue to portray differing perspectives. This method juxtaposes two distinct narratives simultaneously, alternating between two actors as they each share their points of view. The following excerpt demonstrates this device:

J: The boy’s father must see this as a personal attack

Ryo: I am afraid

J: On his son

Ryo: That to speak up
J: On his family

Ryo: In our community
J: I am sure

Ryo: To say what people
Do not want to hear

J: I am sure it is anything
But that

Ryo: Puts us at risk.

(Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, "The Justice Project" 45)

The alternating dialogue between the two characters juxtaposes their different viewpoints, creating empathy for both characters while contrasting their perspectives. This device is one way in which Sojourn includes multiple points of view without alienating or demonizing one over the other.

The show's title invokes images of the judicial system, and while this is a part of what Sojourn explored, the script reflects justice more broadly, touching on themes of privilege, genocide, racism, gentrification, and bullying. Although several reviewers felt the production lacked a strong focal point for the disparate episodes to anchor to, this may reflect the perspective of theatre critics used to narrative-driven work, which, according to Rohd, was not the aim of *The Justice Project* (Rohd, "So").

The War Project: 9 Acts of Determination (2006); Portland, OR

*Don't ask me to admit complicity without demanding responsibility.
Otherwise,
my exercise in conscience
rests on a bed of privilege
so soft,
memory escapes me
like dreams from deep sleep.*

--The War Project

Like many of Sojourn's productions, *The War Project* is a challenging production to write about, due in part to its almost complete lack of narrative. Sojourn deliberately avoided plot to explore the theory "that stories oversimplify the complicated issues we're dealing with" (Rohd, qtd. in Droubay). The cast acknowledged the lack of plot through direct addresses to the audience such as, "You may be wondering if you're going to meet any characters tonight. Maybe invest emotionally in someone?" (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, "The War Project" 10). Drawing on Brechtian techniques, Rohd wanted to prevent audiences from emotionally attaching to the narrative—Rohd wanted the audience to focus on the issues, not the personal stories that arise out of them. The script asks:

Are our stories of the past merely soothing words that make the unknowable known? Do they extinguish curiosity and confusion? Is that what we want?
To understand, even if the understanding is easier than the truth of living?
(The War Project 8)

The War Project contends that story "gives the unimaginable shape" and the cast questions whether this leads to complicity (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, "The War Project" 7). Sojourn's distancing effect was successful, although

reception from the audience was mixed. One blogger felt that the “direct address and ‘neutral mask’/intense focus is unnatural, distracting and ultimately distances because I don’t trust what I’m seeing as real...it’s lying on stage” (Anonymous). Others found the style compelling, expressing its power to shake previously concrete beliefs (Sharp). Critic Johanna Droubay compared the production to “a painting or piece of music that communicates something without telling a story.”

While acknowledging that much of Sojourn’s work is not dramaturgically aimed at narrative, I question this production’s approach of avoiding plot. I find narrative provides an entry point into complex issues, enabling me to relate to abstract concepts in a tangible way. Indeed, when I reflect upon the largest challenges facing our world today, such as climate change, isolation, and poverty, it seems that the abstract and overwhelming nature of these challenges has a distancing effect, whereas personal stories related to these themes create a connection and, theoretically, a greater chance that some positive change will occur. However, while this production sought to explore personal and communal responsibility with respect to war, eliciting positive change may not have been a goal of this production. In any case, I find that in later productions that are also non-narrative driven, such as 2008’s *Built*, Sojourn’s use of audience participation structures provides me with an entry point into the issue, rendering narrative less important as a bridge between the personal and the political.

A collage exploration of the United States' relationship to war, *The War Project* was “more along the lines of a concert than a play” with “live music [accompanying] a series of seamlessly interwoven, dreamlike vignettes” (Droubay). The dreamlike quality framed the play, with the opening line “I do not know how to wake up from this dream” setting the stage for the nightmare to come (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, “The War Project” 2). Sojourn developed the play out of interviews from soldiers, anti-war activists, and politicians conducted in four different states (Weiss-Tisman; Droubay).

Sojourn problematized identity through cross-racial and cross-gender casting. In one scene, Rohd, playing himself, has a conversation with his parents about the production. Multiple actors of different races and genders, alternating between cast members, play each of his parents. Sojourn has a history of “refusing to pair the expected face and opinion” and this device complicates perspectives and “[presents] multiple sides of the war debate with equal credibility” (Droubay).

Although Sojourn's productions always try to avoid providing answers, focusing instead on provoking questions, this production's commitment to this tenet was especially evident as “every time the play [arrived] at a nice digestible conclusion, the actors [yanked] it away and [went] on to deepen the conversation” (Weatherford 53). Part of this aggressiveness may have been due to the audience Sojourn was targeting, named by Droubay as “Portland's devoted political choir.” *The War Project* stated: “clear ideas about right and wrong... are easy to have when nothing is at stake” (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, “The War Project” 27). In a town

known for its progressive ideas and trendy politics, *The War Project* bitingly asked for Portland to rethink its tightly held values.

Community-Based/Issue-Driven Works

The following two productions provide clear examples of Sojourn's community-based work⁴. In *Passing Glances*, Sojourn entered a community to help them address intercommunity tensions and the resulting documentary theatre piece was used to facilitate productive dialogue between opposing parties. *Witness Our Schools*, Sojourn's two and one-half year project on the Oregon education system, is also community-based, but addresses a much broader audience: the state of Oregon. Both shows were developed from interviews with community members and both included facilitated post-show dialogue.

Passing Glances: Mirrors and Windows in Allen County (2002); Allen County, OH

In 2001, Allen County Common Threads, a community arts initiative instigated by Bluffton University, recruited Sojourn Theatre to address growing tensions between the city of Lima, Ohio, and its surrounding townships (Wood 4). Financially supported by the Animating Democracy Initiative, a program of Americans for the Arts, Common Threads developed as a response to Allen County's tense race relations, leadership distrust, and water resource controversies ("Background"; Wood 1). The program sought to address the issues through art-inspired civic dialogue ("Background"). Over the course of 14 months, Sojourn spent

⁴ For more information on community-based performance, see Cohen-Cruz's *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* and *Performing Communities: Grassroots Ensemble Theaters Deeply Rooted in Eight U.S. Communities* by Leonard and Kilkelly.

periods of time in Allen County and interviewed over 400 residents (Wood 1). The resulting production, written as a poetic documentary, reflected the urban/rural divide and misperceptions surrounding both areas (Wood 2). The production consisted of vignettes and monologues woven together with projected images and repeated choreography. The first showing took place on October 11, 2002 at a daylong Common Threads conference, “attended by more than 200 Allen County residents” (Wood 13). After the show, audience members participated in facilitated dialogue in which they were asked to identify viewpoints presented in the show that mirrored their own experience as well as segments that “opened a new *window* into someone else’s experience” (Wood 14, italics in the original). Sojourn designed this exercise for the project and continued to utilize the mirror/window exercise for many of the post-show dialogues in future productions (Rohd, “So”).

The efficacy of this particular show is discussed in greater detail in Chapter IV; however it is worth noting a few responses from audience members and community partners. One Lima City School official commented of Rohd’s artistry: “His work is profound, subtle, anonymous, yet it’s intimate...it’s thinking about everyday conversations—what’s on your mind” (Gilbert, MacDonell, and Weis 27). In addition, the piece reflected Sojourn’s commitment to portraying underrepresented viewpoints, which caused some initial friction between Rohd and Common Threads (Wood 17-18). Common Threads “hoped for a balanced piece that would represent all viewpoints” whereas Rohd’s approach insisted on “voicing that which is usually unvoiced” (Wood 18; Rohd, qtd. in Wood 18). According to Sue Wood’s case study on the project, Rohd contends that “whites always feel their

inherent power is threatened when non-white voices are featured in a work of art” (8). Rohd argued “if half the voices are from non-dominant culture, dominant culture sees a surprising shift from majority to shared status” (Rohd, qtd. in Wood 9). The audience’s response to this approach was largely positive. Wood summarizes:

In the end, Rohd’s piece achieved a finely tuned nuance of multiple viewpoints that was the truth of Allen County. Audience members often expressed surprise as they experienced a reality for blacks or for farmers that was unknown to them, but only a few were disturbed or insulted, and many came away enlightened.

(18)

In 2008, Common Threads and Lima Senior High School asked Sojourn to return to Lima to respond to a community crisis (Gilbert, MacDonell, and Weis 7). In January of the same year, a biracial mother of six was accidentally shot and killed by Lima City police (4). The incident exacerbated an already racially charged atmosphere (4). Sojourn was recruited to interview high school youth, create monologues of the youths’ points of view, and videotape them. The resulting videos were then used to spark facilitated dialogue among high school students throughout Lima, allowing the youth to voice their thoughts and feelings on the tragedy. This intervention depicts Sojourn’s unique place among other community-engaged companies. Although companies often create community-engaged work to address pervasive social issues, it is rare that a company is called in immediately following a

community trauma. Both this intervention and *Passing Glances* demonstrate examples of Sojourn's ability to successfully address social issues through theatre.

Witness Our Schools (2003-2005); Oregon

This documentary theatre piece explains the complex history and challenges of Oregon's public education system. Oregon's education system has a long history of budgetary issues, and at the end of the 2003 school year, schools around the state were forced to close several weeks earlier than planned due to state budget cuts (Dillon). Based on interviews with Oregonians, including students, teachers, parents, school board members, state legislators, farm workers, and business owners, the show presents a collage of voices and opinions illuminating Oregon's education debates by integrating "facts about the state of public education with personal, fictionalized scenes" (Cohen-Cruz, "Network" 142). The show toured for eight months (Rohd, "Re: Thought") and following each performance Sojourn held a talkback with the audience and the actors (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). The company interwove dance, monologues, and short scenes to explore a broad range of debates including teacher unions, the No Child Left Behind Act, immigrant students, and tax controversies. The production demonstrates Sojourn's ability to communicate complex themes in an accessible and entertaining manner. For example, the company created a "Tax Cabaret" which transformed complicated tax issues into digestible information through a comedic cabaret. In another scene, the script elegantly and carefully explored teacher unions, portraying a heated exchange between a husband and wife to voice two opposing sides of the debate. As with *Passing Glances*, Sojourn included a multitude of differing voices and opinions;

however, most voices presented in the show agreed that the Oregon education system was in dire need of reform.

The piece was well received by both lay people and legislators. Sojourn was invited to perform the production at the State Capitol for the State House and Senate (Howard, "Sojourn Theatre"). According to Rohd, after this performance a Republican senator commented "[this production] is the clearest elucidation of challenges we are facing in the state that I have ever seen across party lines" (Interview by Sanborn Stone). One candidate running for a school board reflected that the dialogues presented in the show "were often the words of my neighbors...the dozens of conversations that I had on doorsteps and [in] living rooms match precisely the ones in Sojourn's piece" (Anonymous, "Witness Our Schools"). Following each performance, Sojourn facilitated a post-show dialogue utilizing the mirror/window exercise described earlier (Cohen-Cruz, "Network").

In 2005 the company revisited the production and created a self-reflexive piece, which they presented at the 2005 Network for Ensemble Theatres Festival (Cohen-Cruz, "Network"). The piece included scenes from the original production as well as self-reflective interludes illuminating the project's goals, processes, challenges, and efficacy. It also highlighted their dedication to portraying multiple sides of the issues in *Witness Our Schools*, acknowledging, "that to move any of these complex conversations forward, we have to humanize voices on all sides" (Rohd and Sojourn Theater, "Reflections" 14). Sojourn shared its process with conference participants and reflected on the challenges that arose during the project. This project serves as a model for how theatre can be used to influence public opinion.

Site-Specific Work

Site-specific work refers to theatre that occurs in locations other than typical theatre venues. Site-specific theatre challenges the bifurcation of space between audience and spectator and the location plays a vital role in the production⁵. Nearly all of Sojourn's productions are site-specific in some way; what changes throughout their experimentation is the degree to which the space informs the production. Two very different examples demonstrate the role of the performance space in Sojourn's work.

7 *Great Loves* (2003); Portland, OR

7 Great Loves is an unusual production for several reasons. First, it highlights a shift toward site-specific theatre. Second, it is one of the few productions that has no obvious link to social justice, but rather was a personal exploration of the company's relationship to love. Since my chief concern here is site-specificity, below I focus on how this production marks a shift toward site-specific theatre and audience participation. I discuss the other aspect of this production in Chapter IV.

Although some previous productions had been set in non-traditional settings, in 2003 the company stepped more deeply into a creative relationship with the performance space. As demonstrated by my earlier discussion on *The Justice Project*, Sojourn had a history of using performance space in nontraditional ways. However, *7 Great Loves* marks a turning point with Sojourn's exploration of site-specific theatre. Held in an abandoned warehouse, the company created the show around

⁵For a deeper discussion of site-specific art (including theatre) and its complex history, see *One Place After Another* by Miwon Kwon, *Site-Specific Performance* by Mike Pearson, and "Creating Site-Specific Theater: A Panel Discussion" (available on The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage's website).

the spaces they found compelling, loosely beginning with the theme love, and responding to and interacting with the space to create the show (Howard, Personal Interview). In addition to being site-specific, the piece was also journey-based, leading its 20-member audience on a physical, as well as emotional, journey (Wattenberg, "Untraditional").

Particularly evocative moments from the show included a scene in which audience members peered down into a room to watch two lovers sleeping. As they watched a physical score of the couple's 'sleep dance,' audience members heard voice-overs from the actors playing the couple, narrating a dream sequence that explored the couple's fears of abandonment and growing apart (Howard, Personal Interview; Rohd and Sojourn Theater, "7" 4-5). In addition to engaging the audience through journey-based theatre, the show ended with audience members entering "The Reflection Room" where they could write their thoughts and reflections on love on walls covered with butcher paper (Howard, Personal Interview). In this way Sojourn took a step toward audience participation, incorporating audience interaction *during* the production as opposed to post-show dialogues.

***Good* (2007); Portland, OR**

Similar to *The Visit* in its retelling of an existing text, *Good* took Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan* and rewrote it to explore Portland's business sector. Set in a Subaru car dealership, the production explored the ethics and accountability associated with monetary success. The site-specific production was another journey-based show in which audiences began at a specific location, in this case the lobby of the car dealership, and were prompted throughout the production by the

actors to follow them into various other locations throughout the dealership where episodes of the story were staged. Locations used included the employee break room, employee offices, service areas, and the car show room. The use of space in this production was innovative, with dances on top of and inside showroom cars and actors hiding on top of soda machines and inside cabinets. I had the opportunity to attend a performance in the summer of 2007 while attending one of Rohd's civic engagement workshops and found the show's mix of styles fresh and engaging.

The show opened in an upbeat, musical rock band style, and included scenes featuring Noir, puppetry, and tap dance. As an audience member I found one dance number, a fantasy choreography sequence, to be a particularly compelling example of theatricality. Set to rock group Journey's "Don't Stop Believin,'" the sequence displays a fantasy shopping spree in which characters "[attain] material goods and experience pleasure" (Rohd and Sojourn Theater, "Good" 25). The actors performed the sequence inside the windowed employee offices while spectators watched from the outside. This device highlighted the Brechtian devices of the show in which, both by peering in on what were obviously staged sequences and having to physically travel to different locations, the audience was constantly "in a state of critical self-awareness" (Hallett, "Good"). While some critics found traveling from location to location distracting (Hallett, "Good"), I felt traveling actually added to my own engagement. Traveling through the space stimulated a sense of wonder and curiosity at what each new location would present.

Audience Participation

Many of Sojourn's earlier productions contained post-show talkbacks to facilitate audience engagement. As Sojourn's history moved forward, the company began moving beyond the post-show dialogue model to incorporate audience participation into the production itself. *7 Great Loves* was the first step in this direction. Two later productions, *Built* and *On the Table* demonstrate the degree to which audience participation became vital in later works.

***Built* (2008); Portland, OR**

If *7 Great Loves* marked a step toward increased audience participation with its physical journeying and interactive ending, *BUILT* took the concept of participatory theatre to a whole new level. While conducting research on their 2006 production *One Day*, Rohd discovered that the United States' population was projected to increase by 100 million people over the next 30 to 40 years (Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone). In Rohd's home of Portland, there was little infrastructure to accommodate the projected doubling of the city and Rohd wanted to explore issues related to urban planning and growth (Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone). When Sojourn received an invitation to create a performance piece in Portland's south waterfront area, a controversial new urban development, as part of Portland's Time Based Art Festival, *Built* was born (Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone; Frank).

The site-specific work was set in a "condo show warehouse...big realty meets Ikea" with "constructed bedrooms and bathrooms and kitchens and living rooms" (Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone). The production combined elements of

performance with an open-house showroom atmosphere, providing audience members snacks (Martinez) to nibble as they observed, mingled, and interacted (Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone). In addition to complicating the actor-spectator role through the open-house atmosphere, Sojourn challenged this paradigm further through their expectations of audience participation. The most striking element of participation was an urban planning game that Sojourn asked audience members to play. The game consisted of four phases. In phase one, actors gave audience members a simple monopoly-style game board with four game pieces, each piece representing a different building or place in a city, such as high-end boutiques, section eight housing, sewage treatment plants, grocery stores, pharmacies, and homeless shelters (Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone; Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). Audience members were asked to place their home in relation to the other buildings within their fictional city game board (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). This first phase was played individually, with no interaction between participants (Kaas-Lentz). In phase two, the audience played the same game with a group of six—but in this phase, the audience members had to work together to negotiate the locations of their own homes in relation to all the other game pieces (Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone; Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). As each audience member had different sites to place, with some repeats (for example one person might have a park, a pharmacy, a grocery store and a warehouse while another might have a boutique, a sewage treatment plant, a grocery store, and a restaurant), the game became both a collaboration and a negotiation. In phase three the same game was played in groups

of 12, and in phase four the game was played with the entire audience of 60 (Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone).

The game was a core element of the production and its meaning was deepened by values-based questions interwoven through and between the participatory elements. Audience members were asked to fill out questionnaires about their housing values and to have conversations with each other (Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone; Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). Questions such as “Where do you like to spend your free time?” and “You cannot call it a city unless...” and “I never want to live...” engendered an inquiry into class and privilege as it related to Portland’s urban planning challenges (Hallett, “Sojourn’s Built”; Butler). The production culminated with an interactive mapping activity, incorporating audience answers to the aforementioned questions (*Built*). Actors read audience answers out loud while Sojourn’s media designer Shannon Scrofano used the answers to draw a map of a fictional Portland, which was projected on a wall for the audience to see (*Built*). As the map took shape, audience members shared feedback with the actors, who announced audience responses into microphones, calling out comments such as “We need more cultural centers”, “More breweries!”, “We need medical facilities” (*Built*). The activity allowed audience members to think about and express his or her own urban planning priorities.

The performance elements included “modern dance and theatrical monologues” as well as a visually compelling tightrope sequence in which a married couple reveals their own class and racial privileges while discussing where to live (Butler; *Built*). The sequence illustrates Sojourn’s ability to make complex subjects

simultaneously accessible and visually engaging. As the characters traverse a tightrope strung over a building model of Portland, the wife accuses the husband of classism, saying, “You’re afraid to live near poor people!” when he attempts to mask his prejudice with concerns over her safety (*Built*).

Although the production’s interactive elements made it one of Sojourn’s more challenging shows for the company, combining performance structures with the participatory structures deepened the exploration of values-based urban planning challenges. The “performance piece[s] were designed to help [audience members] play the next round” of the game, and each performance would “complicate” the issues being explored, allowing the performances to influence the way the audience played the game (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz).

Built is an investigation into the theatrical structures that foster audience engagement. By combining choreography, vignettes, and music with participatory frameworks, Sojourn created a spectacle-based frame within which to explore audience interaction. *Built* highlights a turning point in Sojourn’s path toward interactive, participatory theatre.

***On the Table* (2010); Portland and Molalla, OR**

On the Table is one of Sojourn’s most ambitious pieces. Site-specific, journey-based, and participatory, *On the Table* takes two separate audiences on a literal journey of 20 miles where they meet for the final Act. The show begins simultaneously in Portland, OR and Molalla, OR, with two different sets of audiences and actors. Each version of Act 1 pivots around the imaginary memorial services of a city or town elder: in Portland the memorial of fictional Bess Mueller and in Molalla

the memorial for fictional George Henshaw. Sojourn developed the production's characters from research and interviews conducted in Portland and Molalla (Blankenship). The show literally and metaphorically brought together two very different communities to explore the relationships inherent between them. Act 1 takes place simultaneously in Portland and Molalla, Act 2 takes place on a school bus en route to a midpoint location between the two, and in Act 3 both sets of audiences and actors come together and share food, conversation, and entertainment.

The Portland version of Act 1 weaves snippets of Portland history with narrative as members of Bess' family and community share poignant stories from her life. The loosely woven narrative is interspersed with direct addresses by the actors and with values clarification questions, such as "how does [place] affect the way we define ourselves?" ruminating upon the relationship between place and values (Rohd et al, 1). The Molalla version of Act 1 follows a similar structure. In Molalla, the memorial service is for the character George Henshaw, a gruff, rough-talking ex-logger. As characters share memories about George, the audience hears subtle references to the impact of corporate logging industry takeover and economic hardships specific to small town living. Both versions of Act 1 end with a poetic bridge describing the eruption of Mt. Saint Helens and highlighting a commonality between all Oregonians:

This very moment

The entire state of Oregon can see

Hear

And feel the same thing.

A mountain is bringing us together.

(Rohd et al 25)

At this point, audience members at both locations board school buses and travel 20 miles to Oregon City, where they meet for the final Act. While aboard the bus Sojourn connected the audiences by passing out Portland audience members' cell phone numbers to Molalla audience members, instructing the Molalla audience to call their respective Portlander and have a conversation.

Upon arrival at Oregon City, the lines between actor and spectator blurred dramatically. The audience stepped off the buses into a fictional wedding reception for the great-grandchildren of each central figure in Act 1: great-granddaughter of Bess Mueller is marrying the great-grandson of George Henshaw. Audience members sit down at tables as wedding guests while the bride and groom bring the central themes of the show to light, revealing themselves as “stand-ins for their respective places and, by extension, for all the varied communities of our beloved state” (Hughley, “Sojourn Theatre’s”). Audience members from Portland and Molalla were interspersed with each other and Sojourn asked them to participate in a great marriage—a marriage of rural and urban communities. Rohd, in the role of facilitator, asks audience members to consider: “If we were all, in this state, committed to living together, what challenges and responsibilities would we be agreeing to take on?” (Rohd et al 70). After a few moments of dialogue, ensemble members seated at each table summed up their discussion to the whole group through a mock wedding toast, declaring their commitment to working through specific challenges.

One of the unique aspects of this production was Sojourn's reliance on the audience. In order for the show to succeed, audience members had to be willing to engage both with each other and with the actors. As one blogger points out, this show is "remarkable because [Sojourn] actually *need[s]* you to see them in order to complete the play...the play is actually *about* your presence in that room" (Hunter, italics in the original). While the presence of an audience is important to some extent to all theatre, in this case, similar to *Built*, portions of the show depended upon what the audience said and did.

Conclusion

These examples demonstrate the breadth of Sojourn's style and technique. Ranging from adaptations of existing texts, to community-engaged documentary theatre, Sojourn's productions emphasize artistry and audience engagement strategies to tackle complex issues. Sojourn's commitment to "honoring and voicing parts of a community that aren't heard in the dominant culture" is augmented by its insistence to complicate issues, rather than "putting forth a political point of view that must be heard" (Rohd, qtd. in Goldbard 30). Over its history, Sojourn increases the level of audience participation in its productions, highlighting the company's growing commitment to civic theater.

CHAPTER III

PROCESS

Introduction

According to Sojourn's artistic director Michael Rohd, the bulk of Sojourn's productions go through six phases: Conceptualizing, Research, Devising, Construction/Authorship, Rehearsal/Refining, and Production (Personal Interview). These phases overlap as the artistic process unfolds, but they provide a useful frame for discussing production development. Partnership-building, for example, a key component for many productions, is present throughout the arc of a project's timeline. Below I discuss each phase of Sojourn's process, largely in relation to three of their productions, *On the Table*, *Good*, and *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)*. I focus on these three productions due to the amount of information on their creation available to me as well as their place within Sojourn's timeline. Since each Sojourn production has its own specific process and time frame, what is outlined below is not meant as a definitive map of how the company *always* works, but rather provides an overview of Sojourn's process. In addition, since my chief concern for this study is the theatre making process, I will focus most of my attention on the devising phase.

My discussions of *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)* stem from primary research I conducted on the company. In January of 2012, I joined Sojourn and The TEAM, a theatre company collaborating with Sojourn on the production, at the Iowa caucuses where they were conducting research for the project. I observed the research process, which entailed attending caucus events and devising material

from the experiences the cast had at the events and in Iowa in general. Two months later, I joined Sojourn and The TEAM in New York City and observed a portion of their weeklong rehearsal intensive, which focused on generating material for the production.

Phase I: Conceptualizing

Sojourn's artistic director Michael Rohd usually begins conceptualizing a new production a year or more in advance. Rohd brings new ideas to the company to see if there is collective interest, and then periodic discussions and research occur over a span of time (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). New ideas often spring from current projects. For example, Rohd first thought of 2010's *On the Table* while working on *The Race*, a multi-media, interactive production that explored government leadership in the United States (Rohd, Personal Interview; Scrofano and Rohd 32). In *The Race* Sojourn brought people from all over the country together through Skype, increasing the breadth of the audience members who witnessed and participated in the production. Working on *The Race*, Rohd and company member Shannon Scrofano, Sojourn's scenic and multimedia designer, were reflecting on how difficult it is to get people from different locations physically together in the same room (Rohd, Personal Interview: 2). While brainstorming together, they had the idea of bringing two different sets of audiences together—one in Portland, Oregon and one in a rural Oregon town—using buses to transport audience members to a central meeting place during the second act of the show. The idea of audience members sharing a meal together was also set forth during this early stage (Rohd, Personal Interview). These two elements, buses and food, would continue to

drive the project and present Sojourn with unique logistical challenges (Rohd, Personal Interview). In another example, while working on *One Day*, a show about the challenges facing Portlanders, Rohd first began to imagine *Built*. As part of the research for *One Day*, Rohd discovered that Portland's population was expected to double within several decades with little plans "for where even half of those people are going to live" and began conceptualizing an audience-engaged production that would explore themes of housing and development in relation to civic vision (Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone; Sojourn Theatre "2008").

Some ideas are inspired by existing texts. For example, when conceptualizing *Good*, Rohd knew he wanted to create a show based on Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan* (Towey). While brainstorming with the company, they "hit on the idea of staging the show in a car dealership" (Towey). Sojourn approached Megan Wentworth, a Sojourn fan and a member of a family who owned car dealerships throughout Portland (Towey). Megan Wentworth facilitated a meeting between Sojourn and her father, who agreed to allow Sojourn to use one of his dealerships for the show, moving *Good* from idea to working project (Rohd, "So").

Not all ideas originate with Sojourn. As described in Chapter II, Sojourn's 2002 production of *Passing Glances: Windows and Mirrors Into Allen County*, was commissioned by the Lima Arts Council to address tensions in the community of Allen County (Wood 1). Sojourn's current production, *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)* emerged when Rohd was approached by Rachel Chavkin, artistic director for The TEAM, for help on a show exploring the atmosphere of town halls in the U.S. (Martinez; Madzik 4 Jan). The TEAM, an ensemble company based in New York City,

wanted to explore community-engaged work but had no experience with the form (Martinez). Rohd suggested Sojourn and The TEAM work collaboratively on the project (Martinez).

Phase II: Research

At this stage Sojourn usually either has clear community partnerships in the making or is searching for them. With *On the Table*, the company had a distinct idea of what the show would be about before they found a viable community partner. Hence, much of the early research on the project was driven by this quest. They began by visiting small towns in rural Oregon, conducting research to find a site suitable for the Molalla portion of the show (Rohd, Personal Interview). They visited towns approximately 30 miles outside of Portland, and if it “seemed interesting visually,” they researched the location further on the Internet and then attempted to meet with someone from that community (Rohd, Personal Interview). In most towns, the company was able to connect with someone through an existing relationship or contact; however Rohd recalls one instance where company members “literally [drove] into town and just [found] people” who were willing to talk to them (Personal Interview). This is similar to what I witnessed while observing Sojourn conduct research for *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)*. Cast members approached people at caucus events, talking to anyone willing to have a conversation (Madzik 2 Jan.).

Since the company places high value on strong community partnerships, Sojourn decided to stage the rural section of *On the Table* in Molalla, Oregon. Molalla was in the process of forming an arts council and the town was excited about

working with Sojourn (Rohd, Personal Interview). The community's energy and sense of welcome paved the way for a strong partnership between Sojourn and Molalla and demonstrates an example of the kinds of partnerships Sojourn likes to build.

On the Table required extensive research, due in part to the choices to include transporting audiences via buses and a shared meal. Unlike earlier productions, much of the research conducted focused around these logistical pieces as well as finding appropriate sites for the rural showing of Act 1 and Act 3, in which the two audiences meet one another. While some of the research contributed to forming specific characters, broad conceptual research continued well into the year before the show opened in the summer of 2010. The research, devising, and rehearsal periods all overlapped significantly. Rohd elaborates further:

We were simultaneously starting all these different levels of research, and then the research gave way to generative [sic] really quite late in the game, because we were all living in different places, and we didn't have the resources to come back. We did a workshop in the summer of 2009, but it was more on... research than it was on narrative, and it was getting conceptual stuff together. We really didn't start working on the narrative until the winter, four or five months before rehearsal started. We'd been setting up research trips to Molalla over that year, and doing some research in and around Portland.

(Personal Interview)

Many of Sojourn's projects include interviews during the research phase which, consequently, raise ethical questions. This was the case for *Witness Our Schools*, which was devised out of over 500 interviews the company conducted in a single year (Sojourn Theatre, "2005 Production History;" Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, "Reflections"). Company member Rebecca Martinez reflects on the ethical challenges surrounding the process:

There is [a] responsibility of voicing [the people we interview]. They will not be named in the show, and many of the characters in our pieces are composites – but still, you're portraying people who really gave of themselves, and you want to do them, and their ideas, justice. Not just as a performer – as a person with whom you built, even briefly, a relationship. (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, "Reflections" 13-14)

Ethics also play a role in choosing the viewpoints the company selects to represent in a production. Seeking points of view that diverge from the company members' individual beliefs and values is an integral part of Sojourn's research process. Company members challenge themselves to balance perspectives and actively seek out perspectives that will complicate their own:

If we find a point of view, a story, an idea that we like—we have to go out and find the other side. Especially if it's a political point of view... you might find a voice you really like, even agree with—but it's not going in the show unless you find lots of perspectives that...complicate it. So you get prodded to search for something further, because you don't want to lose that first voice.

(Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, "Reflections" 14)

While the ethics of representation can be challenging, Sojourn's research methodology engenders multi-phonetic works layered with nuance and complexity.

In January of 2012, I traveled to Cedar Falls, Iowa, to observe and meet with members of Sojourn and The TEAM. The two companies were conducting a research trip at the 2012 Iowa Caucuses for Sojourn and The TEAM's current collaboration, *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)*. Initially, Rohd and The TEAM's artistic director Rachel Chavkin began the project as an exploration of town halls in the United States (Madzik, 3 Jan.). Chavkin and Rohd were interested in the tension and violence surrounding the 2009 healthcare town halls, and wanted to create a production that would address opposing parties' inability to communicate civilly. The two companies chose to conduct research in Kansas City, where the production will be performed, and the Iowa caucuses, as the companies viewed the Iowa caucuses as a place where decisions occur face to face at a grassroots level.

I spent several days observing Sojourn conducting research and rehearsing. The research entailed observing behavior while attending caucus events. The night of the caucuses, I joined four Sojourn members and three TEAM members in observing Republican voter behavior at one of the largest caucuses in the state, the Cedar Falls Republican caucus, at the University of Northern Iowa. When we met as a group prior to the caucus, Rohd gave us three prompts for observation. First, he asked us to observe physical and gestural body language and find five to ten gestures to share with the group later. Second, he asked us to investigate what drew voters to the caucus and to ask voters how they would define a successful and unsuccessful caucus. Third, Rohd asked us to "play Where's Waldo" and try to spot

someone in a moment of decision-making. Other group members then added their own requests to the mix. We attended the caucuses that night and each of us wandered around, talking to and observing voters. The following morning, we shared our research performatively and debriefed what we had experienced the night before, eventually moving into the devising process.

Phase III: Devising

Early on in the devising process, the company spends a good deal of time exploring and playing with ideas, often without a set idea of where the show will end up. As the company moves deeper into the project and the shape of the production becomes clearer, Rohd begins sequencing scenes and crafting a script. Rohd approaches the devising process with an established framework that he then offers to the cast as a structure within which to work. Company member Kimberly Howard describes this further:

Our work is to create a really tight box, and then... investigate within that box, and then [we]... throw [work] out or keep it. And if we keep it... it kind of goes on a board in Michael's head and then he'll take these different [pieces] and moves them around...

and puts them into a sequence. Rohd will then come back to the company and have them try different pieces in different sequences,

until whatever story we've been trying to tell, whatever set of images or ideas we want to bring the audience along through [emerges].

(Personal Interview)

Although Rohd's framework, or "box" as Howard calls it, varies from project to project, according to company stage manager Liam Kaas-Lentz, Rohd and Sojourn's interest in community responsibility is present to some degree in all projects:

Michael begins, I would say, every process with kind of a framing question that he leads us through, and we always joke, because ultimately the question on all the projects I have worked on has ended up being, 'who are you responsible for?' Whatever the question that started it out, really it boils down to 'who are you responsible for?'

(Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz)

This larger framework grounds Sojourn in its theatre-making process, prodding company members to continually question their own individual sense of responsibility to society.

The devising process is comprised of solo and group improvisations and in-depth group conversations around plot and character. During devising periods Rohd leads the company through a series of improvisational exercises to generate material within the framework he has set forth. He typically provides actors with a prompt, and then sends individuals or small groups off to work on their own for a brief amount of time to improvise around that prompt. The company will then reconvene and actors share their improvisations with each other, sometimes teaching particular gestures or movements to the entire company. After sharing improvised sketches, the company responds to the pieces. Lengthy conversations about character and plot also take place during this phase (Kaas-Lentz, 12 Apr.).

The degree to which the performance space drives the devising period varies greatly from production to production. In order to examine how space can influence the devising process, I now turn to 2007's production *Good*, which was staged in an auto dealership. I was in the audience in July 2007, and can attest to the important role of the space as a signifier in the production.

The devising process for *Good* pivoted around the performance space. Early rehearsals focused on creating site-specific sketches in each of the spaces of the Subaru dealership in which the show took place (Rohd, Personal Interview; Kaas-Lentz, 9-11 Apr.). In one early rehearsal, company members rotated through different areas of the dealership to find interesting ways to move and interact with the environment. For example, actors in the car showroom explored ways to interact with the cars, "crawling through car windows," emerging "from beneath [a] car," "kissing [the] car hood," and pretending to be locked inside a car, "knocking to get out" (Kaas-Lentz, 9 Apr.). Later during the same rehearsal, cast members worked in pairs and threesomes to flesh out specific scenes in the spaces where they were to be performed (Kaas-Lentz, 9 Apr.).

Exactly how does responding to the performance space lead to scene creation? The creation of *Good's* choreographed fantasy sequence described in Chapter II demonstrates this. The sequence was set inside the dealership's offices, which had large glass windows looking out into a big warehouse space. When Rohd first saw the windows, he felt inspired to create a scene that would take place inside the offices. He thought to himself, "that is very cinematic...I want to see something in there, I want to watch something from *in there*...a big dance or something" (Rohd,

Personal Interview). The windows provided an interesting frame through which the audience could observe the scene happening inside the offices. At that point in time, Rohd realized that his desire to see a scene inside the offices had little relationship to the narrative, but part of the devising work for a scene that took place in the dealership office was to figure out “what the [heck’s] going to go in there” (Rohd, Personal Interview). Later in the process, after the company developed characters, Rohd realized the character Gina, played by Rohd’s wife Courtney Davis, could have a scene take place inside the offices. The company choreographed a rock n’ roll sequence “around Gina’s fantasy life set to the song ‘Don’t Stop Believin’ by Journey” (Rohd, Personal Interview).

Before the scene was fully fleshed out, Rohd knew he wanted to merge several stylistic components and enlisted other company members to help figure out how they could collage them together. After Rohd discovered which character’s story the office window space would tell, he ruminated on several theatrical elements before the sequence emerged:

[During the sequence] you can hear a voice, reading a letter [to one of the other characters]. The way that happened was, I asked Courtney to write that letter and then I had her record it. [At the same time] I was searching for a song...and I was searching for a physical life of [the character’s] fantasy world in there. I knew all those things somehow wanted to have a relationship in there, but I needed to hear the letter to understand the tone of it.

(Rohd, Personal Interview)

This kind of collaborative process is typical of the way Sojourn works and demonstrates how the company responds to and incorporates the spaces in which they perform.

Not all of Sojourn's productions, even overtly site-specific ones, are as heavily influenced by the performance space during the devising period. *When* the company gains regular access to their performance space plays a large role in *how much* the space impacts the production. For example, the company began the devising period for *Good* at the Subaru dealership, giving them seven weeks to devise in the space (Rohd, Personal Interview: 2). In contrast, the company did not begin rehearsing in the performance space for *The Justice Project* until a couple weeks before the show opened, and while the space affected the staging process, devising was largely a separate process; hence, the space impacted the production less (Rohd, Personal Interview: 2).

Much of what I observed on Sojourn's devising process while in New York was much more indicative of The TEAM's method of devising than Sojourn's usual process. The TEAM's process is character and narrative driven, whereas Sojourn tends to focus more on concepts, and creates structures and movement around those concepts. As The TEAM's Rachel Chavkin observed in a conversation we had together, The TEAM makes plays; Sojourn makes events. In the devising process for *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)*, much of the process entailed actors writing scenes individually and group discussion around characters. For instance, after group discussion on one particularly complex character, a shape shifting ghost-like woman named LaRoca, Chavkin asked the actors to take some time to research and

write a scene that explored LaRoca's history. The actors spent 30 minutes on this task, working individually on laptop computers, and then read their respective scenes aloud for the group. According to the Sojourn artists, this was atypical of how Sojourn normally approaches devising. Sojourn media designer, Shannon Scrofano, states, "the actors write through improvisation...[on their feet]. They [usually] don't separately go off and write the work" (Scrofano and Martinez, Personal Interview).

Sojourn associate artist Soneela Nankani agrees:

Our improvisations with Michael... are highly, highly physical... acrobatically physical. A lot of jumping, running... highly physical activities. I have never sat in front of my computer, or had alone time with my computer, in a Michael rehearsal. If I have alone time, [it's more like] I have five minutes and I'm coming up with some sort of physical score.

(Personal Interview)

While both The TEAM and Sojourn rely heavily on improvisation for the devising process, in devising for *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)* the improvisation followed The TEAM's style of using it to discover character information, whereas for Sojourn it is usually used to discover structures, images, and movement. For example, when devising the game structure for *Built*, Rohd and Scrofano asked the actors to take a few minutes to "create some way that you can sit down with a small group and get at [*Built's* concepts], in a prop-based way" (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). Actors then shared sketches that utilized props to convey the ideas central to the production, and the board game in *Built* emerged. According to company member Hannah Treuhaft, this type of prompt is "a through line for all rehearsals. It's like,

here's the box you're working in, this is what I roughly think the outcome [will be]—Go figure it out" (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). When I asked Rohd for an example of what a typical Sojourn devising rehearsal might be for *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)*, he concurred with Scrofano and Nankani—"we wouldn't sit around writing, we'd be on our feet. [In addition], we wouldn't be pursuing characters, we'd be pursuing ideas and themes...[For example], we would spend a day creating arguments between people at a town hall meeting" (Rohd, Personal Interview:2). I asked Rohd to elaborate on how he might frame a prompt for this and he responded with the following:

Go off with a partner and come back with an improvisation between two people, with opposing views, who heard each other speak at a public event and then bump into each other in the hall later. Give me the following versions [of an argument]: a heated argument; a small intimate argument you don't want anyone to hear; lovers 10 years ago and this is the first time they've seen each other and they're trying to be polite; just physical dance; and [finally] sitting next to each other and it all happens in the way their hands behave.

(Rohd, Personal Interview: 2)

The above example of Rohd's style illustrates Sojourn's emphasis on movement and gesture as well as the degree of variety his prompts request.

Rohd possesses a set of leadership skills that engender a safe, creative environment for his actors. Throughout the process of leading that I observed, Rohd continually asked actors what they needed to move forward with their creative

process. He was flexible with his prompts, but also clearly directional. He also took a lot of time for the improvised explorations, fleshing them out and trying sketches in different ways. Also, although Rohd was clearly in the role of director, he has the ability to both lead and collaborate simultaneously. At several points during the Iowa research trip, Rohd asked the cast for help, making it clear that the group was “figuring out the show together,” rather than Rohd dictating the direction of the narrative (Madzik, 4 Jan.). He said, “I’ll bring in offerings, but let’s all brainstorm together.” However, while he created an environment that fostered collaboration, Rohd’s leadership was strong enough that he was able to hold a vision for the show. At moments of indecision or opposing ideas, he moved the action forward in a distinct direction while allowing for feedback and collaboration.

Phase IV: Construction/Authorship

The authorship process falls on a spectrum and the amount of writing Rohd and actors each contribute varies between projects. For most of Sojourn’s productions, Rohd is the primary author, and crafts the script out of the work the actors create during devising periods. However, some of Sojourn’s projects are authored more collaboratively than others. For example, different segments of 7 *Great Loves* were written by members of the cast (Rohd, Personal Interview). In contrast, Rohd worked solo to adapt Moliere’s script as *Tartuffe: The Visitor* prior to the first rehearsal (Howard, Personal Interview). In another example, Rohd wrote *The Justice Project* out of the work he led and observed during devising rehearsals (Rohd, Personal Interview).

Rohd will often write a segment based on what he observed during devising rehearsals, and then bring it back to the cast to work with in rehearsal. For example, in a devising rehearsal for *On the Table*, Rohd set up an improvisation between two of the characters. Rohd and the company watched for compelling moments during the improvisation; when something occurred on stage they found interesting, Rohd asked the actors to go off on their own, develop the scene, and bring it back to him (Rohd, Personal Interview). Rohd recorded or transcribed the session, then took those ideas and turned them into a portion of the written script (Rohd Personal Interview). Rohd rewrites and refines throughout this process; rewriting typically continues into the rehearsal/refining phase.

At times company members will contribute writing for a particular scene. For example, when company member Jono Eiland approached Rohd with the idea that his character in *Good* might benefit from a Noir, anti-hero style, Rohd asked Eiland to write the beginning of the scene (Rohd, Personal Interview). Eiland wrote the first few pages, then Rohd added to the scene and then they collaboratively went back and forth, crafting what I thought was one of the most dramatic and engaging scenes in the show (Rohd, Personal Interview).

As discussed in the previous section, for *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)* the actors have contributed a large amount of writing thus far. During the devising rehearsals I observed in New York, Chavkin and Rohd gave actors writing prompts, and actors would spend a period of time (typically 30-45 minutes), individually writing scenes on their laptop computers. At the end of the week long devising intensive, the cast presented a public showing of the work they had created thus far,

and I would estimate that 90% of the material was written by the actors. As previously noted, this process significantly deviates from Sojourn's typical way of working and is more indicative of the way The TEAM devises. Company members Rebecca Martinez and Shannon Scrofano point to the difference in script authorship between the two companies:

Martinez: [During these collaborative rehearsals] everyone spends a lot of time individually, writing different versions of someone's characters, for example a scene of someone's characters. And what we would do as Sojourn is, we'll spend [a short amount of] time improvising...we'll do a circle type of improvisation where we go in and out... we'll improvise for maybe, max, four or five minutes before someone [else] come[s] in...There's a lot of little kernels of ideas that we come up with and we never see them again...

Sometimes we bring in stuff that's written that ends up in the final script—

Scrofano: But Michael is the author.

Martinez: Michael is the author.

Scrofano: Michael is the go off and be the author person. Some things he'll write quickly –overnight or on lunch, but he doesn't [write with us in the rehearsal room].

(Scrofano and Martinez, Personal Interview)

I witnessed tension between Rohd's usual role as author and his collaborative authorship role in *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)* while observing The TEAM and Sojourn attempt to sequence the material they had devised in preparation for the public showing. Rohd expressed his urge "to go away and write

for a week” while simultaneously wanting to pursue the way the two teams were working (Madzik, 26 Mar.). A similar tension arose the following day, when Rohd and Chavkin clashed on process approaches. The group had decided to comb through the compiled script and discuss parts that felt rough or problematic. After over an hour of reading aloud and discussing around a table, disagreements arose over the usefulness of the table work and the public showing. Rohd and the group shared:

Rohd: If something [in the script] isn't working for me, I don't need to see it up on stage later today. I'm struggling with how to be the most helpful and targeted for the group right now. All the work we're doing [around this table] is really helpful, but not for this afternoon[s] [showing]. It's script work, and if we just did what we have as is without going through it, that would be good script work too... I know I'm going to be working on this between now and [the next time we are together]. Going through [the material] fine toothed, I'm not sure how it's contributing, for me, to making this better.

TEAM Actor: I disagree, I'm finding it very useful. The idea of seeing how the work goes together feels useful since [the] Kansas City [performance date] is coming and the time we'll have together between now and then is short.

Chavkin: This is also a huge difference between how the companies work.

Rohd: I just hate sitting around a table. I want to see it on its feet.

Chavkin: We can do that, I just think the problems that we solve will be different—a lot of what we're seeing [around this table are] writing issues.

(Madzik, 27 Mar.)

These process tensions demonstrate one of the largest differences between Sojourn and other devising companies—Rohd acts as the writer, whereas The TEAM’s actors collaboratively write the production together. Although Sojourn actors have contributed pieces of writing to productions at times, they are usually small, and Sojourn members do not spend hours at a time individually scripting scenes during rehearsals. Typically, Rohd will write outside of rehearsal based on what happened during the devising periods, bringing in prompts and drafts for actors to play off of. The above is also indicative of a key style difference between the companies. Sojourn actors are used to working very quickly and fluidly on their feet, “collaging text” and movement together in short periods of time, rendering physical scores (Scrofano and Martinez, Personal Interview). Rohd’s urge to “see it on its feet” reflects this manner of working as well as the physical scores that characterize Sojourn productions.

Since Sojourn’s productions typically consist of vignettes, the sequencing of events is not always determined by the narrative. Sequencing is a part of the authorship process but may occur at various points, depending on the production. In *Good*, the sequencing of the physical journey the audience would travel occurred before the first generative rehearsal began. Rohd and Scrofano planned a route inside the space through which the audience members would traverse. Once the specific spaces and the trajectory were set, Rohd began working with cast members on which of the spaces spoke to their individual characters, and the spaces they chose heavily influenced the scenes they devised (Rohd, Personal Interview). In contrast, when working from an existing text, such as *Tartuffe*, even when devised

movement or song break up the text, the narrative largely drives the sequence, as was the case of the company's adaptation *Tartuffe: The Visitor* (Howard, Personal Interview). For both *The Justice Project* and *Passing Glances*, Sojourn generated all the material before creating a sequence; however, as the company grew in experience, sequencing began to take place throughout the devising process (Rohd, Personal Interview:2).

Phase V: Rehearsal and Refining

Typically, the devising, construction, and rehearsal processes overlap, and the script continues to be revised right up until opening. This is especially true for Sojourn's participatory productions, in which the company relies on a live audience to ascertain how the production will work. For example, although Sojourn experimented with different endings on preview audiences for *Built*, the company did not settle on "an ending... until 2 am before the first show" (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). Last-minute changes require a high degree of flexibility from company members who must be willing and able to modify and/or create their performances as need arises.

Additional challenges during the rehearsal/refining phase arise when cuts are made. During technical rehearsals for *Passing Glances*, concerns over running time emerged as community partners Mary MacDonell and Patricia Romney pushed for a shorter time commitment for audience members (Wood 13). The project included Sojourn's performance and an intermission followed by a facilitated dialogue. Community partners worried audience members would be reluctant to commit to the three or four hours of activities they had crafted (Wood 13). Although

Rohd was concerned that last-minute cuts would eliminate “key viewpoints contained in the piece,” he “did some trimming” as part of a compromise that he, Romney, and MacDonell came to (Wood 13). In another example, Sojourn was forced to cut out a large portion of video work included as part of Act 2 in *On the Table*. As Rohd recalls “it was a very big deal that we could not make the video work as we wanted to, so we had to cut all this work that [Scrofano] and others had done, right as we opened” (Rohd, Personal Interview). While cutting segments of a piece can be heart-wrenching, the decision to do so is an example of Rohd’s commitment to artistic quality and community partner participation in the creative processes.

Phase VI: Production and Audience Response

Once a show opens, Sojourn continuously makes adjustments as needed to the production, especially when the production involves some level of audience engagement. Adjustments vary from altering post-show dialogue prompts to changing an entire ending. Several examples from *On the Table* demonstrate this. The third act of *On the Table* “continued to change through the run” as it contained a facilitation component that Rohd felt needed continuous refining (Rohd, Personal Interview). In addition, Rohd recalls “leading into the third act...I kept changing [one piece of] text so by the end [two of the actors] were just carrying new text and reading it. I just kept learning what it needed so I changed it” (Rohd, Personal Interview). Changing a production after it opens can be stressful for the actors and crew. However, company member Liam Kaas-Lentz appreciates this aspect of Sojourn’s process:

It's incredibly artistically freeing to give yourself permission to not have to have a cut-off. I love that [Rohd] allows us to keep changing and building, and learning, and getting to the right thing. A lot of theatre has a stopping point where regardless of if you're at the right place or not, that's where you have to stop as opposed to keeping the push towards whatever the right thing is.

(Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz)

However, artistic freedom does not include freedom from apprehension. When asked if either of them ever felt worried prior to the opening of a show, Kaas-Lentz and company member Hannah Treuhaft both adamantly replied, "Are you kidding? *Every time!*" (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). Nevertheless, despite the anxiety, being flexible enough to make last minute changes

is something we're really good at. [It] took training on our part; [Rohd] trained us to be okay with the fact that things are going to continue changing after the piece has gone public, because of the fact that we don't really know what we have for the most part until we have an audience there.

(Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz)

While "it would make lots and lots of artists totally crazy to be a part of [Sojourn's] process," the company values the flexibility and freedom that working in this way provides (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz).

Conclusion

Sojourn Theatre Company goes through several overlapping stages to create its work. While the process of making theatre varies from project to project, Rohd usually serves as leader and author, leading the company through highly physical,

improvisational structures emerging out of interviews and studio research. The flexibility of Sojourn actors contributes to the company's artistry. Although Rohd typically authors Sojourn scripts out of what he observes in devising rehearsals, it may be that the collaboration between Sojourn and The TEAM will have a marked influence on Sojourn's theatre-making methods toward a more actor-driven writing process. Rohd's willingness to follow The TEAM's process during this collaboration, despite conflicting methods, as well as the enthusiasm Sojourn artists displayed toward experimenting with The TEAM's devising methods, point toward this possibility.

CHAPTER IV

EFFICACY

I don't understand why a person would do a project like this unless you wanted some kind of concrete change to come out of it. Doesn't it need to see some kind of change in the world, something, to be successful? Otherwise, I'm right back to--what's the point? What's the point? Does anything you do or say matter if it doesn't save a life?

(Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, *The War Project* 23)

Introduction

The above text, said by an actor playing Michael Rohd's father, captures here the very dilemma inherent in any discussion of the efficacy of art—without concrete outcomes that indicate social change, how can we assess a production's (or any artwork's) impact on society? Is it enough to theorize about qualitative impact when concrete measurements are unattainable or impractical? While quantitative measures such as ticket sales and critical acclaim provide some account of a production's public reception, these indicators do not necessarily tell all regarding a work's efficacy, particularly when its purpose is directly linked to addressing specific community or civic issues. In such cases, efficacy often constitutes a wider variety of outcomes, from impacts at the individual level to shaping public policy. In addition, in community-engaged theatre, the degree of community engagement and community partner satisfaction also says much about the impact of a production.

How does Sojourn define its artistic, practical, and sociopolitical efficacy? What barometers are in place that can serve to substantiate its claim to efficacy? Since each production has specific goals and a specific purpose, a universal assessment would be as impractical as it would be misleading. In addition, since

each production's objectives differ from each other, it is equally problematic to compare productions. Not all productions share the same objectives and so no catch-all rubric for Sojourn's work is possible. However, certain indicators help discern Sojourn's efficacy. Below, I posit several impact categories to capture some of the ways Sojourn assesses its work. While differing purposes between productions means that not all categories apply to each, significant overlap exists amongst productions such that the 'success' or 'efficacy' of a production can be illuminated.⁶

Audience Participation

Much of how Sojourn's members evaluate success is closely related to the degree of audience engagement. For example, in *Witness Our Schools*, the company decided they would define success "by how well the show sets up the space for a meaningful dialogue afterwards" (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, "Reflections" 17). Stage manager Liam Kaas-Lentz contends that *Built* was successful because of "the way [Sojourn] was able to get an audience talking to each other" (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). In *On the Table*, cast members facilitated discussion in Act 3 between audience members, prompting them with the question "what are the challenges and responsibilities of living together" in the state of Oregon? (Rohd et al). Participating in exchanges with and between audience members can be more important than the actors' performance. Company member Hannah Treuhaft measures success:

⁶ This study does not seek to measure Sojourn's efficacy, nor does it seek to discuss the efficacy of community-based performance in general. The following texts might be useful for such an undertaking: *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* by Susan Bennett, and *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance*, edited by Susan Kattwinkel.

by how I feel about the conversations that I had with audience members, especially during *On the Table*. I was so highly influenced by what I felt like was happening as it was going on. Are people engaged? Are we getting to good conversations? Does it feel exciting and crackly? So many times it's not about 'oh I had a good show tonight, I felt like I really hit my sweet spot.' Especially with the later work that we're making, success is really measured by the exchanges, in my opinion, rather than what I felt like on stage.

(Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz)

Although the degree of skill Sojourn company members and associate artists display certainly contributes to engendering meaningful exchanges, merely presenting a sharp, skillfully executed show does not accurately reflect Sojourn's purpose.

Community Engagement and Alliance Building

Nearly all of Sojourn's productions involve some degree of community engagement, ranging from building community alliances and partnerships during the development and production process to post-show dialogues. Most Sojourn productions target one or more specific communities. For example, in *Good* the company wanted to engage Portland's business community to build alliances between arts and business (Towey). A partnership with a local car dealership helped attain this goal. *Throwing Bones* engaged Portland's South African community (Howard, Personal Interview). *Witness Our Schools* sought to engage the entire state of Oregon with regard to education policy. Defining the target audience plays a large role in shaping how the company will measure the efficacy of the project, as the degree of successful engagement of the target audience serves as an

important marker of success. However, defining what constitutes a successful degree of community engagement is a muddy process. Rohd discusses his approach:

For me the [measures] are: Do the project and process and production build relationships that didn't exist before? Do the process and the production build moments [when] people who are different from each other actually hear a different point of view in a different way? Do the process and production lead toward opportunities for alliances that might lead to action or ideas farther down the line?

(Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone)

Both *Witness Our Schools* and *Passing Glances* demonstrate successful examples of community engagement and partnership building. In *Witness Our Schools*, Sojourn built alliances between teachers, community members, and policy makers by creating connections between spheres of Oregonians who were not in dialogue together. The production created a space for the voices of people from different sides of the issues to be heard. In addition, Sojourn developed partnerships that gave the project credibility and provided access to audiences. Finally, Sojourn “acted as a particularly unique catalyst for certain conversations amidst decision makers, and they used what [Sojourn] created as impulses for public conversation” (Rohd, Personal Interview).

Similarly, in *Passing Glances*, Sojourn's community partners used the production “to catalyze relationships in the community” (Rohd, Personal Interview). Sojourn was commissioned by the Allen County Common Threads Theater Project to create a production that addressed “issues of race, leadership, and water

resources...[dividing] city and county officials and residents” (Wood 1). (See Chapter II). Sojourn’s process and production were part of the larger Common Threads Theater Project, which included workshops, dialogue facilitation training, and a culminating conference, all targeting community members and civic leaders from urban and rural areas (Wood). In addition to conducting interviews with Allen County residents, Sojourn engaged the community through a technique called ‘barnstorming.’ Groups of cast members visited community gathering sites, such as churches, and performed several monologues “tailored to the specific audience” from the work in progress (Wood 12). After the performance, Rohd or a local facilitator conducted a brief dialogue (Wood 12). This technique created two successful outcomes. First, it spread the word about the Common Threads project and helped generate interest. Second, it provided community members an opportunity “to engage in an ‘intragroup’ conversation” about the issues in a familiar context, surrounded by people with shared values and experiences (Wood 12). The barnstorming technique exposed 3,800 residents to the issues and the project, demonstrating a numerical success of community engagement (Wood 12).

In addition to these process-oriented assessments, the project also achieved several concrete impacts. The culminating conference resulted in community-member-driven action teams committed to addressing the issues reflected in Sojourn’s production (Wood 21). According to Rohd, some of these committees continue to meet (Personal Interview). In addition, “73% [of survey respondents] indicated they felt more likely to get involved in civic issues” (Wood 15). Finally, in 2007, five years after the initial project, Lima City Schools and Common Threads

asked Sojourn back to Allen County to help address a community crisis, indicating the impact Sojourn previously had on the community (Gilbert et al 4).

In order to build alliances between disparate groups, Sojourn puts the voices and experiences of those groups on stage, creating a space for opposing stakeholders to hear each other while also seeing their own experience reflected. The success of this portrayal is integral to the success of community engagement and, according to Sue Wood's case study on the project, Sojourn achieved this end. After viewing Sojourn's performance, one African-American audience member commented, "This is exactly like it is for black folks here—just exactly" (Wood 15). Successfully depicting a stakeholder's experience allows an entry point for them to hear another point of view. As one white farmer commented, "You got us right so I have to trust you got the others right also" (Wood 20). Although the project was successful in the way that it created new relationships, the project did not alter "the landscape for race and class" (Rohd, Personal Interview). However, according to Wood's case study and Rohd, altering that landscape was not an objective set forth in the larger project (Wood, 5; Rohd, Personal Interview: 2).

Anecdotal evidence, when combined with other indicators, further demonstrates community engagement. For example, in his review of *On the Table*, Marty Hughley describes an audience encounter between a vegetarian and an elk rancher who sat at the same table over the course of the meal. According to Hughley, a "friendly and animated" discussion between the two convinced the vegetarian audience member to try some of the local elk stew being served. In another example, according to company stage manager, Liam Kaas-Lentz, the summer camp *Youth*

Plan Too: Toward One Oregon was created in response to *On the Table*, emerging when a summer camp director saw the production (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). The summer camp brings rural and urban Oregon youth together to explore community planning, leadership skills, cultural identity, and address urban/rural tensions (“Youth Plan Too”).

Public Policy

One of Sojourn’s foci is civic engaged theatre, and while this may not directly translate into shaping public policy, several productions did just that. *One Day*, a show that emerged from Portland City Mayor’s Vision PDX project, explored challenges facing Portlanders. After each performance, the company held a post-show town hall. The show toured throughout Portland’s neighborhoods and at each town hall a staff member from the Mayor’s office took notes on the dialogue to include in the City’s visioning plan (Rohd, Interview by Sanborn Stone).

Witness Our Schools demonstrates an even clearer example of Sojourn’s ability to influence public policy. In *Witness Our Schools*, material Sojourn generated during the research phase became a part of public records. Sojourn partnered with the Chalkboard Project, an Oregon education advocacy group, and the Oregon Historical Society (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, “Reflections”). The Chalkboard Project included “some of the script and dialogue work in their recommendations that went to the State House floor” (Rohd, Personal Interview). In addition, the Oregon Historical Society added transcripts of the interviews Sojourn collected to its research library (“Connections” 6-7).

Witness Our Schools also provided the company opportunities to engage with local and state government. The company performed for the State School Board Association (Howard, “Sojourn Theatre”) and the Portland School Superintendent invited the company “to be on a new advisory committee that [would] define a policy for arts in education” (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, “Reflections” 38). The company also performed the production at Oregon’s “Capitol Building for the State House and Senate,” exposing Oregon’s lawmakers to both the education debates and the use of theatre to inform public policy (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre, “Reflections” 27). Although only 17 of the 89 Representatives and Senators attended the show, the event marks important progress in the company’s ability to shape public policy.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics represents the most difficult category to explore because it depends on subjective interpretations of beauty and elusive standards of professional form. Given this difficulty, I rely on audience reception and my own experience as an audience member, reader in the case of scripts, or viewer in the case of video to examine Sojourn’s aesthetics. I find Sojourn’s use of spectacle, text, staging, and sound to be aesthetically stunning. Spectacle such as high wire trapeze and acrobatic choreography, coupled with beautiful stage pictures and poetic text, create a sensory experience unlike any I have experienced elsewhere in theatre. Productions include sound and rhythm, as well as sharp, synchronized movement, which I find engaging and satisfying to watch. Finally, Sojourn productions explore subjects I believe to be of importance to American culture and the company’s exploration of these subjects has impacted my own views and values.

Aesthetics play two key roles in Sojourn's productions. First, aesthetically successful shows provide viewers with a delightful experience. Second, high artistic standards are necessary in order to achieve other aims on a project. Although sometimes "impact...trump[s] aesthetics," Rohd contends that "the aesthetics have to be super successful *for* the impact to occur in a way that [he] believe[s] is meaningful" (Personal Interview). I find that Sojourn's artistry catalyzes complicated issues into compelling and entertaining theatre, providing an entry point into complex conversations. This was the case with both *Built* and *Passing Glances*. Based on the video footage I saw of *Built*, sharp choreography and innovative multi-media amidst a modern, sleek setting made urban planning look fun and exciting. The show contained "incredibly effective dialogical components" that when set against a "fantastic spectacle-based" frame created an aesthetically impressive and highly interactive piece of theatre (Treuhaft and Kaas-Lentz). While it is likely that the dialogical components would have provided an engaging experience in their own right, by framing those components with dynamic theatrics, Sojourn drew the audience members more deeply into the topic, expanding the complexity of the issues through the performances.

In *Passing Glances*, Sojourn's use of poetic metaphor enabled audience members "to experience and confront difficult topics with a sense of wonder" (Wood 17). According to Wood, the use of metaphor also "had a distancing effect," and allowed audience members to "imaginatively entertain an idea" they might normally dismiss (17). For example, Sojourn created a choreographed "Water Movement" sequence to represent the tension in Allen County over water rights.

The piece was performed by the entire cast and repeated throughout the show. The script describes the movement: “each person in unison takes 30 seconds to slowly drink water from the ground, wash their faces, rinse both arms, and finally put their hands up to protect their faces from the rain in the sky” (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre “Passing” 11). Water was a pervasive theme throughout *Passing Glances*. Lines such as “Water, water; Everywhere; And not a drop to drink” coupled with the company’s use of umbrellas to represent isolation and water scarcity, made water an ever-present element throughout the production (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre “Passing” 41). Sojourn also used metaphor to portray tense race relations. In one scene, an awkward waltz between an African-American woman and a white male symbolized the tenuous relationship between the two race groups in Allen County. In another example, a choreographed sequence titled “Passing Glances” portrayed the caution and discomfort between the various stakeholders in Allen County. The actors made “their way across stage in various configurations, pausing awkwardly, avoiding eyes, almost dancing around each other in [slow-motion]” (Rohd and Sojourn Theatre “Passing” 3). This movement repeated throughout the show at pivotal moments to highlight the distrust between opposing groups.

Aesthetics are not just utilized to make complicated issues more engaging and digestible. Sojourn’s work demonstrates high artistic quality across the board, regardless of a production’s theme. Critical reception of *7 Great Loves* demonstrates this. According to critical reviews, *7 Great Loves* was one of the company’s most aesthetically impressive endeavors. Critics described the show as “richly textured,” “magically interwoven,” and “powerfully moving,” (Wattenberg, “Untraditional”;

Silvis, "Theatre Review: 7" 52). The piece won five Drammy awards (Portland's version of the Tony Awards) in outstanding direction, ensemble work, choreography, lighting, and overall production (Wattenberg, "Untraditional"). In addition to winning multiple awards, the piece drew national attention to Sojourn and special funds from the Theatre Communications Group brought several well-known directors from around the country to view the production (Wattenberg, "Untraditional"). Furthermore, the production's popularity elicited an unplanned second run of the show, six months after the first (Wattenberg, "Untraditional"). Unlike other shows, *7 Great Loves* did not contain a social justice focus and I wonder if this contributed in some way to its popularity.

While previous productions explored themes surrounding "what separates [people] from one another," part of the inspiration for *7 Great Loves* was to "spend some time working on what brings [people] together" (Wattenberg, "Audience's" 53; Rohd qtd. in Wattenberg, "Audience's" 53). In this way, *7 Great Loves* acts as a respite from Sojourn's heavier themes of responsibility, race, and justice. Although Sojourn conducted interviews for the show, exploring themes of love with local seniors, at-risk youth, social workers, artists, and people on the street (Wattenberg, "Untraditional"), the interviews were used to "[feed] our artistic needs" rather than finding unvoiced stories to express and honor (Rohd, Personal Interview). "We were collectively making very personal work that was informed by these interactions we had in the world hearing stories."

It is interesting that a production with no aim for furthering social justice received such high critical acclaim. Obviously, there are many examples of

traditional theatre that receives high critical acclaim; however for a company that usually focuses on some aspect of social justice, it strikes me as odd that this production seems to have garnered more acclaim than others, given that its purposes deviated from typical Sojourn themes. Do audiences prefer theatre that is not centrally focused on furthering justice? Or, was there some freedom inherent in the personal exploration of love in contrast to the responsibility inherent in portraying a social justice issue? Whatever the reason, it is clear that *7 Great Loves* achieved a level of artistry above and beyond the company's previous productions.

In my opinion, the artistry of *Good* trumped other measures of efficacy. The show was aesthetically striking, but the content seemed thin and I left the show thirsty for harder questions. My perception, however, likely reflects my anti-capitalism values, and as the show's aim was to explore the ethics of wealth, I will admit I had trouble connecting to the characters and their situation. I left wanting a deeper exploration of the systemic issues inherent in economic disparity. To me, the answers to the questions posed seemed obvious, and the production did not challenge me to rethink my stance on business ethics. However, the artistry and theatricality were exquisite and, as theatre, the experience was delightful.

Conclusion

Art influences individual attitudes and cultural perceptions in a multitude of ways. The complete impact of a work of art is ever illusive. Yet many impacts do have indicators that can be tracked. Sojourn utilizes a variety of indicators to track its own efficacy, emphasizing community engagement and alliance building. Sojourn's assessments include an array of visible outcomes ranging from clear,

concrete actions to more ambiguous but no less important shifts in audience attitudes. According to company members, alliance building, artistry, and a high degree of community engagement are markers of Sojourn's contributions to civil society.

While I have presented numerous indicators portraying Sojourn's positive impact on communities and audiences, I must assume that markers indicating the contrary also exist. As demonstrated by other community-engaged work, such as The Ukiah Players' *UpRooted!*, audiences are not always pleased with how theatre companies depict community issues. Whether or not such opinion exists in documented form remains unclear and warrants further research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study emerged out of a desire to learn how to create meaningful and successful theatre. To begin defining ‘successful’ and ‘meaningful’ for myself, I looked toward community-engaged theatre, utilizing Sojourn Theatre Company as a case study. In order to further my own understanding of how community-engaged theatre companies create their work, as well as discover how they measure ‘success,’ I have examined Sojourn’s process and claims to efficacy.

With Michael Rohd as its leader, Sojourn Theatre Company creates highly physical, aesthetically stunning, community-engaged theatre. I have outlined Sojourn’s development as a company from their inception in 1999 to their current collaboration with New York’s The TEAM. I have described Sojourn’s theatre-making process and illuminated the structures on which the company typically relies. Finally, I examined the company’s own methods for assessing the efficacy of its productions, demonstrating the company’s breadth of signifiers.

My research process entailed reading scripts, reviews, viewing video footage when available, interviewing company members, and observing Sojourn’s progress on its current production, *Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)*. I conducted interviews with Rohd, company members and associate artists, and observed three days of research and five days of rehearsal. Reviews of Sojourn’s productions, particularly later works, were easily accessible. However, I faced several challenges during the research process. First, little video of Sojourn’s work is available in public form, and while I hoped for access to the company’s video archives, they are held by

Rohd in Chicago and time and funds prevented me from viewing them. Since much of Sojourn's work is physical and visual, I relied on interviews and firsthand audience accounts to piece together the nature of Sojourn's productions. In addition to a lack of video footage, I was also unable to witness a typical Sojourn rehearsal. Although I spent over a week (cumulatively) observing the company work, since they were collaborating with The TEAM at the time, what I observed did not accurately reflect Sojourn's usual process. I drew a large portion of my discussion of Sojourn's process from company member interviews, as well as from Sojourn's stage manager's rehearsal notes from past productions.

Sojourn's process is largely driven by founding Artistic Director Michael Rohd. Rohd serves as author and director, and company members often emphasized his role as writer. Rohd leads firmly, yet collaboratively, steering Sojourn in a direction while encouraging company member contributions. Rohd provides company members a framework within which to work and actors devise quickly and fluidly on their feet, utilizing long and short form improvisation structures. While Rohd emphasizes collaboration, as an American white male in the role of Artistic Director, he is subject to a long sociological history fraught with power imbalances. Rohd mitigates his position of power within the company in a number of ways, including asking for member opinion and needs throughout a project's process, and encouraging member-driven projects. None of the company members or associate artists I interviewed spoke of conflicts surrounding Sojourn's leadership system; to the contrary, it seemed that all appreciated Sojourn's current structure and enjoyed Rohd's leadership style. While examining Sojourn's power

and leadership dynamics was not the aim of this study, a future study might explore this power differential.

Sojourn often creates its work in collaboration with a performance space and increasingly relies on and responds to this space as an equal partner in devising. Audience participation goes hand in hand with Sojourn's site-specific work. Site-specific productions "instantly renegotiat[e] the contract between performer and audience," "[challenging] the passivity of spectatorship" (Rohd, qtd. in "Creating Site-Specific Theater"). By eradicating the bifurcation of space, Sojourn's site-specific productions invite its audiences to actively engage in the production, becoming partners with Sojourn in creating the performance event.

In addition to documenting Sojourn's process, I also laid out some of the methods company members employ to assess their productions. These assessment methods reflect Sojourn's emphasis on audience participation and community partnerships as important barometers for success. Sojourn's work produces a number of traceable results, such as shaping public policy, pointing to Sojourn's growing role in civic society. While arguing for and substantiating the company's claim to efficacy was not a goal of this study, I discovered clear markers signifying exactly that. However, a critical examination of the full impact Sojourn's work remains unknown and requires further research.

Exploring how Sojourn creates theatre and measures its efficacy has informed my own relationship to production work. As a director I have gained new appreciation for approaching productions through physical exploration, rather than beginning with text. As an actor I am inspired by the creativity Sojourn's fast-paced

devising process sparks, and as a writer I am moved by Rohd's and the company's ability to poetically explore complicated themes textually. Discovering Sojourn's assessments for efficacy has helped clarify my own definition of the elusive terms 'success' and 'meaningful.' After completing this study, it is clear to me that a production's target audience is intertwined with any assessment of success. In addition, exchanges between performer and audience members play a key role in assessing success. As company member Hannah Treuhaft notes (Re: *On the Table*), the efficacy of a performance has more to do with how the performer and audience member engage together than it does with a performer's degree of skill.

Artistry also plays an important role in the efficacy of a production. A piece of theatre may have an incredibly compelling message, but if its aesthetics are not successful, its impact will suffer. As a company with a commitment to artistry, Sojourn's productions emphasize aesthetics and impact equally. In addition, the company's emphasis on including multiple perspectives engenders a more receptive audience, further increasing a given production's efficacy. Sojourn's combination of multiphonic viewpoints, high artistry, and meaningful themes form the foundation of its success.

Further research on Sojourn might include a more detailed study of Sojourn's generative process to aid scholars in understanding the complexities of creating successful community-engaged work. This research might entail documenting and theorizing about Rohd's leadership as well as documenting specific devising practices. A study framing Sojourn's work within the field of devising would further illuminate Sojourn's devising practices. Also, a deeper examination of the

relationship between the performance space and the generative process would help clarify the company's relationship to site-specific theatre.

Additional research on Sojourn might also include closely tracking its impact on constituencies and communities. In addition, an in depth study of the financial or organizational structures that support Sojourn would add to the growing body of research detailing how small companies survive in a climate of shrinking support for the arts. Such a study would also aid new companies in establishing their own financial frameworks for operation. Finally, a deeper discussion of the relationship between Sojourn's aesthetics and its impact would contribute to an understanding not only of the company's efficacy, but also the fraught relationship between art, aesthetics, efficacy, and professionalism.

It is clear to me that this company holds a unique position in community-engaged theatre. Sojourn has demonstrated both its efficacy and its artistry through unique productions that lead the way toward audience participation and civic theater. Sojourn tackles complex themes, and utilizes striking aesthetics to explore and illuminate the intricacies of these themes. The company's approach to civic engagement demonstrates a practical model for how theatre participates in civic discourse.

APPENDIX

SOJOURN THEATRE

MAINSTAGE PRODUCTIONS TIMELINE

1999

Wish the Moon, Swallow the Whole Hot Sun

(March 20-22)

Burruss Auditorium Stage, Virginia Tech

2000

Rhinoceros

(February 29-March 5)

Squires Student Center Studio Theater, Virginia Tech

Look Away

(2000-2002)

Toured in Virginia and Oregon

2001

Cities on a Hill

(January/February)

Echo Theater; Portland, Oregon

The Justice Project

(June/July)

Gus Solomon Federal Courthouse; Portland, Oregon

Tartuffe: The Visitor

(November/December)

Echo Theater; Portland, Oregon

2002

Passing Glances

(October)

Allen County, Ohio

Hidden

(April)

Anne Frank Exhibit, Lloyd Center; Portland, Oregon

2003

7 Great Loves

(February/March and August/September)

B&O Warehouse; Portland, Oregon

2004

Greed

(Improvised Production; Location and Dates Unknown)

Witness Our Schools

(September 2004-April 2005)

Toured; Oregon

2005

The Visit

(February/March)

Marshall High School; Portland, Oregon

Reflections: Witness Our Schools

(June)

Network of Ensemble Theatres Festival; Dell Arte, California

2006

The War Project

(March/April)

Sojourn Studio; Portland, Oregon

One Day

(Fall)

Toured; Portland, Oregon

2007

Good

(June/July)

Wentworth Subaru Service Center; Portland, Oregon

2008

Throwing Bones

(March/April)

Concordia University's Nursing Skills Lab; Portland, Oregon

The Race

(October/November)

Davis Performing Arts Center; Georgetown University, Washington D.C

Built

(September)

Time Based Art Festival; Portland, Oregon

2010

On the Table

(July/August)

Rosse Posse Acres; Molalla, Oregon and The Church (Portland Playhouse); Portland, Oregon

2011

Finding Penelope

(March)

Luther Manor; Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

2012

Waiting for You (On the Corner of...)

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