

Performing Horizontal Activism: Expanding Academic Labor Advocacy Throughout and Beyond a Three-Step Process

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KEYWORDS

organic theater, academic labor, performative activism

In Adrianna Kezar's edited collection *Embracing Non-Tenure Track Faculty: Changing Campuses for the New Faculty Majority* she cites several campuses as case studies of what she posits as three fundamental phases of adjunct advocacy and integration: mobilization (phase one), implementation (phase two) and institutionalization (phase three). Kezar suggests that movement from phase one to phase three is accomplished through a range of mechanisms including governance, executive caveat, outside expert or consultant recommendation, unionization, and activism.

Our experience suggests that this model is useful for understanding the status of equity efforts, but that grassroots perturbation is necessary to move through each of these stages. In this article, we put Kezar's model into conversation with a call from Maria Maisto, President and Executive Director of the New Faculty Majority (NFM), for greater utilization of the arts in the academic labor movement: "Advocacy for adjuncts and their students needs to be carried out using all of the communicative tools we have: the full range of media, rhetorics, and art forms that can convey the humanity at the core of the issue." Specifically, we share our experience enacting academic labor activism through organic theater, a performative organizing tactic that can be used to build community horizontally within rehearsal and performance spaces while productively linking academic labor equity with other local and regional organizing efforts.

Our experience suggests that organic theater can be used during any of Kezar's stages to complement and excite traditional approaches such as surveying faculty, developing professional association position/policy statements, and increasing non tenure-track faculty participation in shared governance. We believe that performative interventions like organic theater complement Kezar's Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success, which provides tools by which institutions can undertake systematic analysis and improvement of labor policies, and build more inclusive environments within the academy. With Maisto, we believe that creativity and artistry can stand alongside statistics, data, and other empirical approaches, make both theoretical and tactical

contributions to the existing advocacy repertoire, and allow those most affected by contingency to have a voice in its public de-authorization and dismantlement.

THE ROMERO TROUPE'S ORGANIC THEATER

In order to put Kezar's three-step process into conversation with Maisto's call for performative interventions in the academic labor movement, we turn to a local, horizontal organizing tactic called organic theater. An unpolished, emergent form of stage production, organic theater was developed by Denver's Romero Theater Troupe, an all-volunteer group that describes its work as "social justice through organic theater." Troupe founder Jim Walsh, a senior instructor of political science at the University of Colorado at Denver, describes organic theater as a "beautiful, sometimes messy, method" in which theater is created through "a collective process and a consensus model." Although Walsh coordinates many of the Troupe's appearances, there is not one designated "director" or "playwright," and the Troupe relies instead on a horizontal structure. Most of the Troupe members have no formal acting experience, and their performances are often affiliated with local organizing efforts.²

One such effort inspired our play. During the fall of 2012, a group of custodians at Denver's Auraria campus reached out to the Romero Troupe³ to ask them to facilitate a performance of the custodians' workplace struggles. The custodians were working with the organization Colorado WINS,⁴ and hoped to galvanize campus and community support for their organizing effort.⁵ At their performance at Denver's Auraria campus, faculty, staff, students, and community members were brought face to face with the custodians' everyday work experiences and were compelled to consider their own complicity in the custodians' exploitation. Indeed, it was the excruciating banality of the scenes depicted—a supervisor screaming at a custodian, a human resource representative handing out English-only contracts to Spanish-speaking employees, a student refusing to lift his legs to allow a custodian to roll a trash can down a hallway—that made the experience of viewing the play uncomfortable, at times even unbearable. Dramatic theory suggests that this spectator discomfort serves a rhetorical function, transcending simple identification with characters in the play in favor of defamiliarizing the familiar⁶ and revealing the injustices hidden in everyday events. Augusto Boal, author of *Theater of the Oppressed*, connects this discomfort to the act of the human being "obser[ving] itself" and "see[ing] itself seeing" (qtd. in Linds 114).

Approaching the performance as rhetoricians, rather than dramatists, led us to focus on the play's rhetorical possibilities, particularly the fact that the play asked audience members—the majority of whom were students or teachers—to see themselves as complicit in the custodians' working conditions. Viewing quietly, audience members were asked to respectfully absorb the magnitude of the events, the dignity of the people who had endured them, and consider how they might support the custodians. Following the performance, three new members joined the union, and students, faculty, and staff came together to stage an on-campus solidarity demonstration. We were also struck that the performance defined academic labor outside the confines of solely teaching and suggested the potential for solidarity across university labor tiers.⁷ The custodians' play demanded that those of us involved in academic labor organizing draw attention to the interconnectedness of contingent

employment and the ways in which contingency is experienced differently across race, class, and gender.

It also demanded that we build a process for working through the internal struggles of workplace organizing—a process that was visible in the narrative arc of several of the custodians’ scenes. For example, one custodian staged the way she overcame her fear of joining the union as she witnessed injustices faced by her colleagues. This evolution demonstrated that internal education about each others’ workplace struggles is as, if not more, important than persuading workers to join a union or other advocacy organization. The custodians’ play also offered an opportunity to educate a campus audience in what it means to be an ally; in another scene, a student persuaded a fellow classmate to make room for a custodian pushing a cart down a hallway.

The custodians’ performance showcased the potential of theater to simultaneously engage internal capacity-building and external coalition-building. We decided to implement a similar organizing strategy at the campuses where we teach and work—Colorado State University and Front Range Community College (CSU/FRCC).

ADAPTING ORGANIC THEATER

In sharing the process of putting together this performance, we do not claim to define a reproducible organizing framework, but rather to share one possible way of linking Kezar’s model with Maisto’s call for performative activism. While writing about activist theater in this way risks “delimit[ing] the underlying generative power of the work itself” by suggesting that readers should “replicate what ‘worked’ in one context into another” (Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman 1), we return to Kezar’s model to consider the importance of recognizing the differing statuses of advocacy of varying campuses, and adapting performative activism accordingly.

The Romero Troupe’s organic theater—which, although it sometimes begins with loosely scripted scenes, prioritizes off-the-script improvisation—was adapted in several important ways to suit the needs of our local productions. In the custodians’ play, storytelling workshops gave way to loosely-framed scenes, but these scenes were largely improvised, even on performance day. Our play at CSU/FRCC, however, relied heavily on pre-scripted scenes due to the fact that we were new to organic theater and had just begun to develop trust among participants. Given the high turnover among both GTAs and NTTF, creating a stable and tight-knit group of actor-organizers will doubtless be a continued challenge. There were, however, some important elements of organic theater that we retained in our plays on campus, particularly the emphasis on a transformative rather than contemplative understanding of performance (Schaedler 141) that aimed to engage audiences in academic labor organizing, and the use of scenes to stage conversations that happen in the “theater of real life” (Boal, qtd. in Schaedler 142).

To put together the play, over the span of one year, we began with localized coalition-building at CSU and FRCC. We identified non-tenure-track faculty, tenure-track faculty, graduate teaching assistants, and part-time and full time faculty who were involved in local advocacy efforts, and held preliminary meetings; then, we put out a broad call for participants via Facebook.⁸ We met every 1-2

weeks to write collaboratively and rehearse emergent scenes and monologues, followed by periods in between these rehearsals when participants would edit their individual monologues and scenes. These scenes were then merged via Google Docs to form a meaningfully sequenced narrative.

Preliminary scenes were developed by drawing on Theater of the Oppressed exercises, such as “the machine,” in early rehearsals to get a sense of how each participant positioned him- or herself in the “machine” of the university. After a few early rehearsals, a former adjunct instructor showed up at rehearsal with a short monologue about his struggles on the job; this inspired other participants to draft monologues articulating their own stories, from internalized narratives of “white-collar work” to family financial obligations. These monologues offered an opportunity for individual participants to situate their individual struggles with contingent employment within the context of their students’ and colleagues’ struggles, and connect those struggles to national trends. Out of these connections, we ended up titling the play “Contingency: A Crisis of Teaching and Learning.” The monologue approach allowed participants to confront and externalize the struggles that prevent them from speaking out about their working conditions, simultaneously functioning as “a vehicle for organizing and as an integral component to the organizing process itself” (Picher 88).

Rehearsals allowed the time and space to educate each other about organizing tactics and, in many cases, re-evaluate the efficacy of those tactics, working towards a capacity for participation that integrated the personal, the aesthetic, the pedagogical, and the political (Cohen-Cruz 103; Picher 80, 88). For example, in developing scenes about NTTF’s fear of speaking out about their labor conditions, we revealed persuasion strategies that were not effective (such as stressing the need for full-time jobs, when not all NTTF actually want them) and developed new approaches (e.g. shifting away from invoking the part-time/full-time divide and instead emphasizing the need for pay equity). This shift also drew attention to the fact that many designated “part-time” employees actually work far more than 40 hours per week.

We “piloted” the play on a day locally deemed New Faculty Majority Day in April 2013; that fall, after another composing and rehearsing process (which also saw new individuals added to the production), we performed during national celebrations of Campus Equity Week at CSU and FRCC. After each performance, we facilitated an audience Q&A, conducted an exit survey to assess responses beyond those vocalized, gathered an e-mail list of those who wanted to get involved as actors and/or activists, and edited video footage for YouTube.⁹ After the two performances that yielded a higher turnout than previous Campus Equity Week events (which included keynote speeches by national leaders in the academic labor movement), we adapted an hour-long segment of the play to be performed in a local grange hall alongside the Romero Troupe’s new play, *Semillas de Colorado: Stories from the Struggle*.¹⁰ In this context, stories of academic labor were set alongside stories of Colorado activism around police brutality, deportation, gentrification, and imprisonment—a broader context that allowed participants and audiences to identify threads of injustice (economic, political, class, gender, and race). This context also showcased several scenes and monologues focusing on the impact that community members can have on education politics. For example, one of the monologues recounted a play participant’s grandmother’s advocacy for elementary school students in Florida, emphasizing “community responsibility” for education conditions. Following

our first joint performance, the Romero Troupe re-titled their play *An Adjunct in Ludlow*, thus linking adjunct labor issues (depicted in framing scenes) to historical labor struggles in Colorado including the Ludlow Massacre, and performed for a packed house in Denver.

The Romero Troupe often invites audience members on stage during its performances; in Theater of the Oppressed work, too, audience members are invited to step into the play and shape the dramatic action. Because we knew audience members might not want to be “outed” as labor activists, we chose to engage audience members collectively. For example, at each campus performance, we asked the audience to take a mock “midterm exam” where they were asked to identify local and national academic labor activists and advocates. At the grange hall performance, we staged a scene that depicted an adjunct reluctant to join the organizing effort, and as the scene ended, she turned to the audience and asked them to stand if they had ever been afraid to speak up in a workplace out of fear of losing their job. As she stood in front of the room, she remarked, “This is what solidarity can look like—many people who are scared standing together.”

These performances, facilitated by the horizontal, broadening base of concerned and implicated actor-workers, brought together different activist communities in northern Colorado and facilitated coalition-building among various local and regional organizing efforts. We want to elaborate on the lessons learned from the coalition-building among four-year and community college academic labor activists, which demonstrate the unique affordances of performative activism as it relates to Kezar’s three stages.

BRIDGING THE FOUR-YEAR/COMMUNITY COLLEGE DIVIDE

The rhetorical situations of the campuses of CSU and FRCC, separated physically by less than five miles but separated philosophically and administratively by substantially different modes of governance, nonetheless shared similar concerns around contingent academic labor. The status of each campus in terms of Kezar’s model of integration was substantially different. Similar concerns and differing positions thus provided context and exigency for a type of cross-campus advocacy that was new to the local setting. Yet the challenge remained of how to bridge the two worlds of a community college and a four-year Research I institution. Organic theater provided a mechanism for undertaking the democratic conversations that ensued across this historically deep divide, united under the shared condition of contingency.

This approach was of particular interest to academic labor organizers at CSU because of the fresh take that it represented. Advocacy at CSU had reached a kind of maturity, perhaps even Kezar’s third stage, “institutionalization,” after more than a decade of collecting data, undertaking surveys, contextualizing the local situation within national trends, and making a case for non-tenure-track faculty (NTTF) inclusion in shared governance, salary exercises, and other mainstream functions. “Institutionalization” here does not imply an end state, but simply suggests that it is no longer possible for an institution to continue with business as usual and exclude adjunct voices. At CSU, arguments in favor of institutionalization, which were firmly embedded within the institutional logic of the

university, had succeeded on many fronts. An elected official, state representative Randy Fischer, had been persuaded to carry a piece of legislation that lifted legal barriers to multi-year teaching contracts, an achievement that had been unimaginable just a few years earlier. Even the President of CSU, Tony Frank, had enthusiastically declared 2013-14 “the year of the adjunct.” However, despite pay raises, job reclassifications, and improved working conditions, problems remained, such as gross inequities in pay, exclusion from voting rights on Faculty Council, and the absence of non-tenure-track career trajectories. It sometimes seemed that administrators had grown self-satisfied, and activists had grown weary.

Meanwhile, at FRCC, the extreme transience of the workforce had created a pattern where advocacy efforts had periodically developed and faded away. Still, adjuncts from the Fort Collins campus were “re-organizing,” talking with administrators, working with the Denver campus of FRCC to create a new chapter of the AAUP (American Association of University Professors), and working with Representative Randy Fischer to carry another bill, this one focused on the substantial pay inequities of community college faculty on part-time appointments. However, at the institutional level, efforts at adjunct advocacy and integration (the forming of an institutionally recognized adjunct group) were still in their infancy, or arguably somewhere in Kezar’s “mobilization” phase.

While the mobilization phase can be an exciting and active time, we have found that the institutionalization phase, as experienced on the CSU campus, can lead to complacency and an absence of vigilance. A university can tell itself that “we addressed the problem” and declare the problems resolved, the situation over. At CSU, performance thus served as a way to mobilize during the period of *post*-institutionalization. While institutionalization had yielded increased stature and respect for faculty off the tenure track, it was becoming clear that it would take decades for NTTF to feel truly enfranchised, much less valued and respected. They were not yet, after all, compensated fairly; they were still barred from full representation on Faculty Senate/Council, and they were still perceived in many circles as a sub-professional academic labor class that threatened tenure. In other words, not even institutionalization could right all the wrongs. Organic theater, in dramatizing these issues, emerged as a way of revealing the injustices and constraints that remained, reminding faculty and administrators that the process of institutional change is an ongoing one.

The situation at FRCC was different, but the performance was equally relevant. The transience of the workforce, the relative dearth of shared governance, and the resulting lack of grievance procedures and due process for contingent employees had made institutionalization efforts seem somewhat hopeless. However, several months after the play was performed at FRCC, the college began officially recognizing the Campus Instructor Committee (CIC) by offering paid positions for board members and a stronger voice in faculty governance. The CIC, in turn, served as a way for advocates to find each other, leading to off campus gatherings, membership in the FRCC chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the New Faculty Majority (NFM), and participation in the play, with the play offering a unique opportunity to extend advocacy efforts into other social justice movements through collaboration with CSU employees and the Romero Troupe.

Performative activism thus offered an alternative to the logos-driven arguments that dominated

the push towards institutionalization at both campuses. Furthermore, because the performance sought to break down the entrenched divides between academic labor tiers, it “argued” in a way that countered the hierarchically-embedded arguments of traditional campus advocacy, opening up the possibilities for movement throughout and beyond Kezar’s sequence of adjunct integration. This resulted from laying bare the arguments we have all heard within the university and juxtaposing them against the lived reality of academic workers. For example, activists might have heard the following:

Arguing that higher pay will lead to increased retention of talented instructors?
Administration would love to pay instructors more but the state keeps reducing funding for higher education. Want to criticize the system’s general over reliance on part-time labor?
It’s the adjuncts’ fault for basing a career on the unrealistic expectations of part time college instruction.

In a traditional, institutionalized context, we might respond to this argument by shifting the burden of responsibility (*administrations must be held accountable for the de-professionalized work of college instruction*), a claim that is easily ignored. However, within the context of a performance, the goal is not to “win” arguments, but to stage workers’ lived experiences and provide space for conversation and community building, goals that are crucial for the survival of academic labor advocacy efforts.

For example, one scene portrayed an adjunct explaining to a student that he is not able to discuss the student’s paper with her after class because not only does he not have an office, but he has to rush across town to get to his other job. In this scene, audience members were shown the complicated human dimensions of slogans like “teaching conditions are learning conditions”: the difficulty of the student who simply wants to get some help from her professor, but also the difficulty of the adjunct instructor who works as a “freeway flyer” and wants to serve his students the best he can in an environment where he is not valued or supported. Traditional institutional arguments regarding this freeway flyer’s dilemma, on the other hand, might focus on the cost savings associated with keeping contingent faculty below the Affordable Care Act’s mandatory coverage threshold (30 hours) or the effect upon retention numbers when undergraduates do not have ready access to faculty assistance.

Thus, storytelling became activism, and art became an implicit argument that attempted to fill in the cracks between those “rational” arguments and positioned contingent employees in proactive subject-positions (Cohen-Cruz 103). Throughout the rehearsal and composition process, we wondered, *how, exactly, do these stories serve as a call to action? Or is the work of the play more of a performance of solidarity, a suggestion of what it might look like to stand together across rank—something that cannot be easily quantified in the language of “argument”?* This approach might be criticized for enacting the tyranny of experience, but we tried to tamp down any claim of unassailable personal storytelling by having multiple, even conflicting, stories and by layering those stories alongside empirical data that one would expect to see in “institutional” arguments (which appeared on a Prezi and complemented each scene or monologue). These stories were layered alongside ever starker examples of civil and human rights violations when we performed *An Adjunct at Ludlow* alongside the Romero Troupe’s stories of police brutality, deportation, and imprisonment—a juxtaposition of stories that demanded that participants articulate the broader economic conditions

that lead to contingency, exploitation, and violence.

MEETING AND TRANSFORMING CONSTRAINTS

While this process of forging local and regional coalitions and speaking collectively about workplace injustice was important for the participants involved, it was not easy or simple. One of the key constraints in developing this consciousness around labor, we found, was the neoliberal individualization of both the problem and the solution. Widely circulated narratives around the individual's responsibility for job and life satisfaction are part of what Dana Cloud describes as "therapeutic rhetorics," which direct citizens toward seeing political-economic inequities as personal failures subject to personal remedy. Such rhetorics of personal rather than structural responsibility are, Cloud argues, "A political strategy of contemporary capitalism, by which potential dissent is contained within a discourse of individual or family responsibility" (xv). In contrast, an organic theater production brings the individual's suffering into context, setting it alongside that of others and redirecting responsibility toward the structures and policies creating it. Such an approach is consistent with Cloud's argument that the ubiquitous deployments of rhetorics of therapy protect organizations while pathologizing workers.

Although denaturalizing these therapeutic rhetorics is essential work, it is also exhausting. Much of the "work" of putting together the play was affective as well as rhetorical. Would the performers experience negative blowback from administrations? How would we frame our individual stories within larger economic trends in order to mitigate this fear? How could we identify and articulate the overlaps between K-12, GTA, adjunct, and tenured concerns without erasing power dynamics? How could we responsibly connect the privileged position of the faculty member to the situation of the custodian and other marginalized workers? How could we add humor to the equation to engage audiences without depressing or alienating them?

Several other constraints made (and will continue to make) it difficult to address these questions and maintain horizontal organizing spaces across these significant contextual differences. Time was one major constraint. Given more time to work on the play, we could have created more skits (instead of relying mainly on monologues) that "enacted" patterns of exploitation. The fact that the final play was monologue-heavy may even indicate form-reflecting-content, given how isolated we are from each other in the workplace; it was difficult, if not impossible, to identify shared "scenes" that we could enact. This constraint did teach us a valuable lesson that reflects Boal's argument that "oppression exists when a dialogue becomes a monologue" (qtd. in Schaedler 143), and necessitated that we use the space of theater rehearsals to name this shared sense of isolation, finding ways of connecting that did not focus on our frustrations with students and colleagues,¹¹ but rather on the link between working conditions and learning conditions in education writ large. This process suggests that making spaces to collaboratively deconstruct workplace alienation is essential to academic labor organizing, particularly if we wish to grow towards the Romero Troupe's more improvisational and "organic" aesthetic. Ultimately, the monologue structure allowed participants to articulate issues that intersect with contingent employment, including mental health struggles and environmental

justice—links that we hope will be enacted in scenes of future productions.

Another linked constraint had to do with the lack of participating adjuncts (for a variety of reasons that included fear of reprisal, a further demand of precious time, and a sense of powerlessness), and the overreliance on GTAs to fill the roles, a constraint in itself in that GTAs, while more willing to participate, not only had limited personal knowledge of adjuncting but would be graduating and moving on soon, hence reducing their immediate stake in the conversation. The GTAs' position as contingent employees who (for the most part) had only a two-year commitment to the institution, however, did allow them to participate with less fear of reprisal than the NTTF who hoped to teach at CSU/FRCC for years to come.

Internalized narratives about so-called “psychic income,” to use a phrase first documented by Alice Gillam (48) and later popularized by Eileen Schell (40), were another constraint in addressing critical questions. Because many NTTF (and indeed, most workers in 2014) report feeling lucky to have a job at all—let alone one that they find rewarding—they may feel reluctant to critique their working conditions. In the play, this issue is addressed as the “labor of love” fallacy—a notion that we denaturalize in order to suggest that the “I am not worthy” narrative must be confronted and revised. For example, one monologue features an adjunct instructor at CSU staging an internal debate that she has every day at work, where she juxtaposes the material conditions of her work with its interpersonal rewards, posing the question, *why do they do it?* By making this debate public, she was able to both reveal and deconstruct the way the labor of love fallacy individualizes and silences workplace struggles, resonating with Boal's definition of social alienation as internalized oppression, which he termed “Cops-in-our-Heads” (Popen 125).

While tiered labor conditions could also be viewed as a constraint, this ultimately necessitated that we work through microaggressions typical in the academic workplace, and that we perform our complicity in each others' exploitation (as well as our own). For example, the play included an exchange between a GTA and an adjunct, where the adjunct calls out the GTA for criticizing tenured faculty; this served as a moment to educate our academic audiences about the administrative pressures on tenured faculty, and allowed us to define both NTTF and tenured faculty overwork as linked effects of public divestment from higher education. This scene grew out of an actual exchange within a rehearsal and represented the type of education we gave each other as we put together the play.¹²

While we anticipated audience backlash given the dominant narratives (“therapeutic rhetorics” and “psychic income”) that surround academic labor exploitation, as well as Colorado's conservative labor politics, the Q&A sessions and exit surveys suggested our audiences' generosity and willingness to engage in the idea exchange that we imagined ourselves part of. Including the audience in our philosophy of “common cause” across rank led to some important moments, as when Rep. Randy Fischer, co-sponsor of HB 14-1154, which called for the state's community colleges to “maintain only one salary and compensation schedule...for all faculty,” was clearly moved by the performance and spoke passionately at the end and in support of the play's effect on him. Although Fischer's attendance and support is not enough in itself to change policy, it does suggest a political audience capable of effecting change. Students, too, expressed a desire to work for labor justice on campus: as

we fielded their questions, it became clear to us that future work must carve out spaces that actively engage students in questions of contingency to build alliances between NTTF and students. The Q&A sessions thus revealed potential solidarities, and also opened up space to consider the work that still needed to be done.

HORIZONTAL ACTIVISM GOING FORWARD: PERFORMANCES TO COME

Horizontal organizing and performance continues to suggest new possibilities to us, and has led us to question where (or whether) our activity might be placed on Kezar's continuum of reform. When using her three-phase concept as a theoretical lens, we found that these efforts complicate a linear, institutionally led plan of adjunct advocacy and integration. As a result, we began to think of our activity as a grassroots approach that can facilitate collective action at any stage of reform. Within the literature of academic labor activism, there are two key new ideas here: the larger social justice connections that are forged by a horizontal approach, and a newly "deployable" form of academic labor advocacy approach that is offered by performance art. There is also a kind of synthetic multiplier effect that derives from these two features—the horizontality alongside the performativity. Participants not only gain wider understanding of how their issues connect by virtue of the horizontal approach, but they engage in critical literacy building and coalition-building as contingency is understood to be a condition shared by a wide group of people with interrelated challenges. Through the performance, we were able to understand and present ourselves as a group that might be described as a "precariat," perpetually contingent—whether on classroom enrollments, on state budgets, on immigration papers, or on translators—and discernible to ourselves and to others.

None of this was easy—not for us as organizer-actors nor for other community actors, and certainly not for our audience members, who were deliberately implicated in the injustices shared on stage. Yet our experience suggests that this is productive tension, one that combats complacency. Since change may in time serve little more than the hegemony it once challenged, a central problem for faculty labor and community activists alike is the need to maintain a posture of vigilance, to remain relevant and responsive to emerging needs and issues, to keep moving forward through phases of advocacy and integration, as suggested by Kezar's model. We believe that horizontal, community-based composing and performing practices, such as those offered by organic theater, offer an ongoing kind of promise. Such approaches are "productive" in the sense that they convey a great deal of information to interested and implicated parties while also empowering participants to contextualize their own experience and raise the level of discourse from the local and experiential to the national/international and conceptual/theoretical. They offer not only a window into the lived experiences of those who are marginalized but also a vehicle for those who are marginalized to become more direct contributors to the conversations that impact them.

NOTES

¹ When the three of us collaborated on this theater project, Vani was a graduate student in rhetoric and composition and teaching assistant at CSU, Joe (who had recently graduated from CSU's rhet/comp program) was teaching as a part-time instructor at Fort Range Community College, and Sue was an Assistant Professor of English at CSU.

² Interestingly, the Troupe was born when Walsh—himself a NTTF—began pushing against the bounds of standardized curricula within his classroom by using theater to teach history, resulting in administrative pushback (and nearly losing his job) (personal communication, August 1, 2014).

³ Vani was involved in organizing the composition and performance of the play.

⁴ Workers for Innovative and New Solutions, which is affiliated with AFSCME, the Teachers, and the Service Employees.

⁵ See Pickett, “Denver Custodians Rehearse Resistance Onstage.”

⁶ Bertolt Brecht terms this the “alienation effect” (91, 95).

⁷ This is related, in a sense, to The Metro Strategy, which creates large collective bargaining units across institutions so that a campus on one side of town is less likely to undermine another's organizing efforts in a different part of town (Schmidt). This approach draws on the long history of alternative organizing that has replaced the classical organizing of the 1930s-60s, bearing some resemblance to the Coordinated/Pooled Resource Strategy, as defined by Craft and Exeijt, in which varied unions join forces to coordinate efforts and increase efficiency, conserve resources, and enlarge community support (25).

⁸ Nearly all of the participants were women who taught first-year writing as GTAs or NTTF, reflecting the gendered and contingent nature of composition instruction. Because CSU's composition department had adopted an “Ethics in Higher Education” theme for the academic year, many GTAs discussed contingent employment with their composition classes during Campus Equity Week, and/or invited their students to the play. A separate study revealed that because of their contingent labor conditions, many GTAs did not feel safe discussing these issues explicitly in the classroom; however, they did feel comfortable offering their students extra credit to attend Campus Equity Week events like the play.

⁹ Given the complex and differing institutional contexts, safety became an especially important feature of the work of the play's participants. Some participants asked us to edit them out of the video since their stories were quite personal and they were concerned about both threats to their privacy and the potential for employer retribution. We honored their requests and also vowed to work such concerns into future productions.

¹⁰ At both locations we filled the auditoriums, which seated around 80; our community performance drew over 100.

¹¹ The focus on difficulties with students—which we acted out in improvised scenes—did serve an important function in allowing NTTF (particularly young women) to voice their frustrations with gendered classroom dynamics. However, thanks to valuable feedback from allied NTTF who attended one rehearsal, we omitted these scenes from the final production and replaced them with facts/figures about the high percentage of women in contingent teaching positions.

¹² While we hoped that this performance of complicity would motivate play participants and audience members to action, the audience's reaction would remain impossible to foretell. As with the Auraria custodian performance, where audience members were compelled to bear witness, to see scenes that complicate the institutional narrative and reclaim the story in the “theater of real life,” we hoped that they could offer existing yet unknown organizing efforts (Martin 27).

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