Collaborating with Artist-Mentors: Library Instruction in the Rehearsal Room

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There is a noticeable lack of literature addressing the challenges of teaching research skills for creative projects to student artist-researchers in the performing arts. Compounding this, the space, time, and labor such teaching demands can create problems of scale for academic libraries. This article proposes collaborating closely with artist-mentors in order to learn about and support their methods in creating research-driven work. This opens an opportunity for librarians to learn new approaches to creative research that can be taught in the library classroom. Moreover, it fosters artist-mentors' knowledge of and enthusiasm for library resources, which they bring with them into the rehearsal room, creating a scalable model of library instruction in the spaces in which performing arts students are particularly receptive.

Making Research Dance

As Librarian for Performing Arts at New York University (NYU), I provide library instruction to scholar-artists spanning a range of artistic disciplines from drama and dance to filmmaking. Although many of the library instruction sessions I teach are scholarly in nature (e.g. theatre studies classes), a substantial number are geared toward research for creative practice (e.g. visual research for designers, historical research for dramatic writers, etc.). As a librarian and a theatre and performance studies scholar, I am well prepared to teach scholarly research skills and methods. However, even with a strong background in performance practice, I have struggled to find approaches to teaching research skills and methods for creative projects.

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Research that attends to the challenge of library education for theatre student-artists is scant.[1] A common theme across much of this research is that widely used approaches to teaching research methods and information literacy such as the ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy are not particularly well suited to the work of scholar-artists.[2] As Lindsey Reynolds writes in a chapter about the research methods visual artists use in the recent edited volume, *Creators in the Academic Library*, "What we need to change most is the way we talk about research with artists. The way libraries and information literacy are presented too often formalize the practice of research in a way that removes it from art students' experiences of research."[3]

One of the creative research sessions I teach is for third-year undergraduate dancer-choreographers who are preparing original social justice-themed works for Tisch Dance's Second Avenue Dance Company. During my first ever instruction session with these scholar-artists several years ago, I introduced them to library resources they might draw on in their work, ranging from subject-specific databases to fine art texts. During the Q&A at the end of the session, one student asked: "This is all great but what do we do with it? How do we make the research dance?" If commonly used approaches to teaching research methods and information literacy do not work well in the context of library instruction for scholar-artists, how *do* we teach these students how to make research dance (or sing or act and so on)? This question has been at the forefront of my mind as I've worked on creating approaches to teaching the skills and methods necessary for scholar-artists to engage in the alchemical process of transforming research into performances, designs, scripts, scores, and films.

As I was beginning to delve into this problem, I had the pleasure of working as a library consultant with Tisch Drama guest artists Alicia Morales and Kirya Traber who introduced me to one such method: their use of Saidiya Hartman's notion of critical fabulation as a framework for creating critical, research-informed devised performance. Working with Morales and Traber led me to rethink my approach to teaching research for creative practice in two important ways. First, fostering relationships and collaborations with the

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1. A literature review here would only serve to duplicate existing efforts to synthesize this exceedingly small body of scholarship. See, for example, Dianna E. Sachs and Michael J. Duffy IV, "The drama of information literacy: Collaborating to incorporate information literacy into a theatre history curriculum," *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 28 no. 2 (2022): 194–218 and Jennifer Mayer "Serving the Needs of Performing Arts Students: A Case Study," *Libraries and the Academy* 15, No. 3 (2015): p409—431.

2. "Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education," Association of College and Research Libraries, accessed May 13, 2024, https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

3. Lindsey Reynolds, "Artists' Research Methods," in *Creators in the Academic Library: Instruction & Outreach*, eds. Alexander C. Watkins and Rebecca Zuege Kuglitsch (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2023), 117.

artist-mentors that the students in my liaison departments work with creates opportunities for me to learn their methods of artistic research and to bring those methods into the library classroom. Second, that collaboration with these artist-mentors deepens student engagement with and enthusiasm for library resources. Artist-mentors bring this knowledge and enthusiasm to students in rehearsal rooms and performance spaces, creating a scalable model of library instruction in the spaces in which students are particularly receptive. I will use this experience as a case study of sorts, drawing on interviews with Traber, Morales, and others involved in this collaboration, as well as Hartman's work and the work of theatre and performance studies scholars invested in research-based practice, to show how working directly with artist-mentors in this manner can help to answer the question of how research can be made to dance.[4] It is my hope that this experience can provide a model for approaching library instruction for creative projects in collaboration with artist-mentors at other institutions.

Reaching the Rehearsal Room

NYU is a private, global R1 institution that houses the Division of Libraries (DoL), which encompasses the New York City campus's flagship Bobst Library as well as libraries at degree-granting NYU campuses in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai, and additional NYC libraries such as the Institute of Fine Arts library. The Division's Research and Research Services department houses most of the Division's liaison librarians. Liaison librarians at NYU have the privilege of working in relatively narrow subject areas. My role as Librarian for Performing Arts includes liaison relationships with most of the programs and departments at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts (excluding a handful of visual arts-oriented programs) and several performing arts-related programs at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

Tisch is composed of multiple performing arts-oriented departments and programs including Drama, Graduate Design, Undergraduate and Graduate

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4. All interview participants are cited by name here with the written consent of the interviewees per the guidelines of NYU's Institutional Review Board, by which this project was granted an exemption. When discussing sensitive topics, the names of the interviewees have been withheld.

The interview questions I used differed slightly depending on whether I was talking with students, artist-mentors, or library colleagues, but generally focused on the overall experience of working on the production, familiarity with libraries and archives, the types of research materials participants recalled using, and how participants incorporated those research materials into their work on the production.

Quotes from the interviews have been lightly edited to remove interjections such as "um" and "like."

Film, Dance, and Dramatic Writing. Tisch Drama is one of the largest departments at the school, with total enrollment numbers averaging over 1,400 at any given time. Because of the large number of students enrolled in the programs and departments I liaise with, my instructional load is relatively heavy, often consisting of 25+ one-off sessions per semester. Of these sessions, about half are for sections of Introduction to Theatre Studies (ITS), a required course for all Drama majors, taken in their first or second semester. Despite the number of ITS sections I teach, I'm able to reach only half or fewer of any given year's incoming Drama cohort. To make matters more complicated, Tisch Drama operates on a studio model, meaning that students are trained as members of studios both within Tisch such as the Musical Theatre concentration and the Experimental Theatre Wing and at external studios across NYC such as the Stella Adler Studio and the Meisner Studio. Although the studio system allows Drama students to pursue advanced training in the techniques and areas of practice that best reflect their interests, it creates a degree of decentralization in the department that makes it difficult to reach students across the various studios.

The difficulty I experience in trying to reach the full incoming Drama cohort is compounded by my awareness that, however engaging the ITS library sessions are, I do not encounter these students in the spaces they perceive as being the most meaningful and impactful for their education as performance makers. Whereas I encounter them in the formal space of the library classroom, the spaces where these students are most energized and engaged are rehearsal rooms and performance spaces. Having spent time with these students both within the library classroom and in rehearsal and theatre spaces, it's very clear to me that they are most attentive and receptive to learning in the latter. I share the students' passion and excitement for the spaces in which artistic creation happens and, as someone who has spent a significant amount of time immersed in those spaces myself, I am well aware that there's little to nothing I can do to make our library classrooms as compelling. Given this, I am invested in finding opportunities to reach Drama students in those spaces, particularly in ways that are more easily scalable than in-person instruction sessions at the library.

My work with Traber and Morales in the spring semester of 2023 gifted me with a new approach to teaching creative research methods and new ways to both scale library instruction to reach a greater number of Drama students and to shift that instruction to the rehearsal and theatre spaces that best facilitate learning for these students. Morales and Traber were invited as guest artists to create a devised piece titled *The Poverty Archive: Box 1* as part of Drama's Festival of Voices. The Festival of Voices was once (it was discontinued in the 2023–4 academic year) an annual part of the Tisch Drama Stage production season dedicated

to "exploring timely social issues affecting New York City."[5] *The Poverty Archive* responded to this prompt by drawing on the archives of Greenwich Village in order to "reclaim the record, highlighting the genius, culture making, and beautiful experimentation [ref Saidiya Hartman] of those categorized as poor."[6] I was introduced to Morales and Traber in the fall of 2022 by Mauricio Salgado, Director of Applied Theatre and Associate Chair of Tisch Drama, through an email asking if I would be interested in meeting with them to discuss their gaining access to the university's archives, orient them to Bobst Library, and help them refine their research questions and methods. Our collaboration continued through the fall in preparation for the spring semester rehearsals.

I first met with Morales and Traber on Zoom to discuss the project and following our initial meeting, having learned more about the project and how the library might be of support, I created an itinerary for a visit to Bobst including a tour, a discussion of general library resources (circulating materials, databases, etc.), and a meeting with NYU Special Collections archivists, Janet Bunde and Danielle Nista, to discuss the contents of the university's archives. This itinerary was developed very much in response to Morales and Traber's needs and interests. Of the start of our work together, Traber said:

> You presented yourself right away as someone who was really interested in not only what the library has to offer as its own formal sort of brand but also as interested in learning about my process as I was about learning what Bobst had to offer, which was a wonderful invitation and isn't always the case.[7]

This mutual openness created the conditions needed for me to learn more about and respond to the project and for Morales and Traber to invite me into their process. Approaching this collaboration with curiosity and care from the outset established a solid rapport and sense of trust that would eventually bear on how Morales and Traber discussed the library and modeled research-informed creation during the devising process.

Working with Morales and Traber on this project led me to think of instruction differently. Rather than conducting a research session directly with the students involved with the production, I provided instruction to the art-

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5. "Tisch Drama Stage 'Festival of Voices' Tackles Poverty and Housing Insecurity in NYC," Tisch Drama, March 24, 2023: https://tisch.nyu.edu/drama/news/tisch-drama--festival-of-voices--tackles-poverty-and-housing-ins.

6. "Tisch Drama Stage 'Festival of Voices," Tisch Drama.

7. Alicia Morales and Kirya Traber (co-directors) in conversation with the author, April 2024. All subsequent quotes attributed to Morales and Traber are drawn from this conversation.

ist-mentors working with the students, from whom they were eager for guidance and instruction, and who could bring their approach to research directly to the spaces in which Drama students are at their most attentive and enthusiastic. Thirteen students worked on *The Poverty Archive*, ranging from undergraduate Drama students working as performers, co-devisors, stage managers, and assistant directors to graduate students from Tisch's Design for Stage and Film department. Although the number of students were fewer than I typically encounter in an ITS session, I was able to connect with students across studios and across Tisch departments. These students have continued to develop research-informed works with other Tisch students, part of which involves introducing these colleagues to the process of conducting creative research. It struck me that this was a more organic way to reach a greater number of Drama students and was more scalable than traditional library instruction sessions.

Critical Fabulation as Method

In addition to leading me towards a new set of ideas for conducting library instruction, Morales and Traber introduced me to the method of research-based creation, Saidiya Hartman's method of critical fabulation, that they employed in this particular production. Critical fabulation was developed by Hartman as an ethical mode of telling the histories of enslaved Black women, using archival materials to produce speculative—and richly historically informed—accounts of the intimate and interior dimensions of Black life that exceed the violence and silences of Black life in institutional archives. In "Venus in Two Acts," Hartman recounts her challenges working as an historian within the extant archives documenting accounts of chattel slavery. In these archives the voices of the enslaved are non-existent; the enslaved are instead encountered in the ledgers, diaries, and legal documents of captors and masters. For Hartman, engaging with these archival materials on their own terms alone encourages recounting of the violence they attest to, thus producing additional violence. In response, she proposes a method for doing more than "recount[ing] the violence that deposited these traces in the archive" without "committing further violence in [her own] act of narration."[8] This method is critical fabulation: "a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history" by "playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story," "re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view," "jeapordiz[ing] the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account," and "imagin[ing] what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done."[9]

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8. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism* 12 no. 2 (2008): 2.
9. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.

In other words, as a method critical fabulation encourages engagement with archival materials in ways familiar to many performance makers whose work centers marginalized communities and peoples: (re)telling stories from minoritarian perspectives by rearranging story elements, shifting perspectives, and using imagination alongside research to tell what would otherwise be impossible stories. Critical fabulation adds to these performance making practices an insistence that telling these stories requires deep engagement with archives and research materials, such that the resulting speculative work is both historically informed *and* highly critical of the structures and practices that shape the contents of archives and the historiographic approaches they most readily enable. As Roz Mortimer puts it: "This is not pure imagination at play," but, rather, "a form of critical intervention that is utilized to redress imbalances of power."[10] For Hartman, this constitutes a figurative trespass of "the boundaries of the archive."[11]

Morales and Traber applied this approach to their library and archival research at Bobst in both a figurative and a material sense. As Traber describes it:

> We ended up […] veering from what was formally in the archive in terms of what showed up in the piece […] but still, being able to pore over and use everything that was available to me—the visual layout of archive of university materials, the languaging of how they spoke about the [Washington Square] Village and who the university was talking to, whether it was an article about one of their donors or a student handbook—that all informed me in a sort of percolating way.

Here Traber describes an approach to working with archival materials consistent with critical fabulation: drawing deeply upon those materials but ultimately veering from them in order to tell a story that could not otherwise be told when accepting the materials on their own terms. Instead, Morales and Traber read between the lines of the university's affiliations and its official communications in order to shift focus to minoritized students and unaffiliated residents of the Village affected by the university's policies, real estate holdings, and fundraising apparatus.

Critical fabulation informed Morales and Traber's approach not only to the research process itself but also to the activation of research materials within the space of the rehearsal room. In discussing how these materials were used in rehearsal, Morales explained:

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10. Roz Mortimer, "Flaunting Artifice: Restaging History as Critical Fabulation in *The Deathless Woman*" in *Constructions of the Real* eds. Christine Rogers, et al. (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2023), 160.

11. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 9.

There's a pendulation between, okay, we're looking at this source/we're going into imagination. We're talking about what really happened/we're going into how that makes you feel. We're doing sensory impressions/we're talking about what happened here. So, this pendulation between past and present or imagination and fact, that feels like a dance.

To which Traber added:

And then there's also what we believe is truth, right? I find that the impression of a factual thing has sort of an orb around it of sensory truthiness. And you can get really far from it, or you can be really on it. And [...] art is in the—I'm thinking now of the cell body—and it's in the gelatinous space between the cell wall and the nucleus. And that's where we want to [be].

Alongside their reading between the lines when conducting research, Morales and Traber brought additional methods to bear on the materials they worked with that resonate with Hartman's methods in her groundbreaking text *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*. In one chapter, Hartman describes a fight between two young Black lovers, the primary historical trace of whom exists in the notebooks of Helen Parrish, the white "slum reformer" and landlord they rented a room from. Of this fight scene Hartman writes, "[i]t isn't a scene anywhere in Helen's notebook" but notes that "[i]t isn't difficult to imagine."[12] In order to draw this scene for the reader, Hartman uses a timeline of events set out in Parrish's notebook but fills that timeline in by means of speculation informed by historical research about the conditions these lovers would have found themselves in and by imagining how that might have made them feel and act. This is the pendulation Morales describes. This is how research can be made to dance.

The creative trespass of the boundaries of the archive is clearly observable not only in Morales and Traber's approach to the research and rehearsal processes but in the resulting production as well. That the show was oriented around a rethinking of archives and how histories might be told from them is evident in the show's title. As artists, Morales and Traber positioned themselves as trespassers in the archive from the outset, engaging with the archive as a space of performance complete with props, scripts, and rehearsed motions. As Traber says:

I mean, everything's theatre, right? And so I enjoy that [process]—check in your backpack, grab a pencil, go to the reference desk, get your box, this little thing has a stand and a little thing to turn it. I enjoy that.

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12. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 141–2.

Framing archival research as theatrical process itself resonated with the students working on *Poverty Archive*, reframing a space that many of them thought of as highly formal and opaque in its modes of organization and rules of operation, to become as approachable as the rehearsal room. Ariana Montoya, one of the students who participated in the production as a performer and as Assistant Director, recalled excitement at hearing about Traber's theatricalized experience of the archive:

> I kind of had a very particular view of that because I had more time with Kirya and I would hear a lot of these really exciting [stories]. I remember in particular the really old handbook that she had to go through with […] a little tweezer and she flipped through it because the pages were already falling apart. And that was so interesting to hear. I'm a little bit of a history nerd so it was so exciting to hear. […] That's really cool to get to look to something that has been around for so long.[13]

The practice of trespassing the boundaries of the archive was also enacted in the show's set, which was heavily informed by a behind-the-scenes tour of NYU's Special Collections with graduate set designer Jade Chew. *The Poverty Archive* was performed in Tisch's Abe Burrows Theatre, a small black box that was arranged in a three-quarter round configuration with the playing space framed by a series of upright flats creating a wall upstage. The sole set pieces were archival storage boxes, which were reinforced in order to allow the performers to stack, stand on, push, throw and otherwise engage with them, as well as several box carts. During each performance, the performers used markers to tag the upstage wall accumulating into a graffiti-like mural of text during the course of the run. NYU Assistant University Archivist, Danielle Nista, who accompanied me to one of the performances, recounts:

> I felt like the experience of researching and the experience of working with the archives was very present in the show, even though there was no scene where someone sat down with the box, pulled the cover off, and took out the folder. It was the emotions that you feel as you're encountering stories in an archive, […] it was the experience of looking at the layers of a document or layers of an archival object and experiencing all of the different facets of it. These are not one-dimensional things; they don't just tell us one thing, there are many angles for you to look at it.

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13. Ariana Montoya (student performer and assistant director) in conversation with the author, April 2024. All subsequent quotes attributed to Montoya are drawn from this conversation.

The interaction with the idea of archives and the interaction with the idea of preservation and access and story and continuation was so present throughout the entire work. I think a lot of factors come into play there. It's the set design of having actual page boxes in the scenes and that being an integral part of the storytelling experience: students sitting on them, students throwing them around, lifting them up, moving them from here to there. You can't necessarily do that in an archive because […] that is not conducive to long-term preservation. But it's representative of the way you have to approach your research in that you're going to interact with this in a way. Yes, the box has a certain formal function. But how can I do something unexpected with this? How can I look at this from a different angle by literally lifting it up and moving it to a different angle?[14]

What Nista describes here is a physicalization of Hartman's conceptual call to play with, question, and rearrange archival materials as they are presented in the reading room. Furthermore, as Traber explains:

We riff on archive architecture in the set design and having the archive boxes and moving them around and what was tagged on the walls was sort of a mix of […] something that was inspired by research versus a personal impulse or *literally a pushing against* [emphasis added by author].

Not only then did the production make material the notion of remixing the archive, it also showed how doing so opens a space of resistance—a space in which the archive might be used to displace and contest authorized accounts.

We can see critical fabulation at work in the research process that informed *Poverty Archive* and in its staging. It is however, more difficult to see how this work itself shapes the parameters of the archive and the histories that can be told from it. Not only did Morales and Traber's methods result in a production that was extensively researched and critically informed by the archive, but also one that sought to make a mark on the archive in both a literal and a figurative manner. The record of the production has now entered the university's archive, expanding the archive itself and providing new ways of understanding the other documents and information contained therein. For Morales and Traber this involved introducing new material to the archive by means of a layered process of research and creation that included archival materials alongside other kinds of documents and knowledge that the students brought to the production. Of one vignette, in which the students crafted the text of the scene from emails and other communications they had received regarding financial aid, Morales says:

14. Danielle Nista (archivist) in discussion with the author, April 2024. All subsequent quotes attributed to Nista are drawn from this conversation.

That was written material, not archived [material], that they really did engage with and picked apart. Like, what is it that they would have wanted to add to the archive? And how might that change a sort of orientation to things that feel removed—to have a sense of, what are you adding?

And later, Traber added:

One of the things we started to talk about were practices and technologies for navigating experiences of poverty, especially at NYU. And that was a really interesting thing. Like, this is how you deal with the dining cards, this is how you do this, this accumulation of knowledge about how to do that that the students really took over on their own. […] So, yeah, you're building archives, as well as working with preexisting archives.

Nista also observed the way the production understood the archival research process as something that itself makes an indelible mark on the archive:

Another thing that really struck me in the work was [that] during some of the transition scenes, the students had markers and were writing on things. Obviously, markers are a big no-no [in the archive]. The reason that they're not allowed is because they make indelible marks on the material. So, if something goes wrong, and you accidentally mark something up, it now changes the object forever. And it's harder for someone 50 years down the line to know whether that was something someone originally did or something someone did after the fact. But in the moment of actually creating a record and creating history, to me, you are making an indelible mark on the human story. So, to see people actually doing that: the set is now invariably changed, it's different than it was before. And that mark is still there. That mark is now on this box. So, it's this representation of like, even just by virtue of interacting with the records, you are making a mark on them because you're producing new content, you're producing a new commentary on the object itself.

Although critically engaging with the archive as well as indelibly marking the archive in the process is not a direct focus of Hartman's writing, critical fabulation as a method does exactly this, creating an opportunity to show student artist-scholars how their work engages with broader conversations and contributes to ongoing research inquiries.

This is the promise of critical fabulation as a method both for research-informed performance making and for teaching student scholar-artists how to conduct and integrate research into their creative projects, moving beyond the

formal strictures of frameworks like the ACRL's Information Literacy Framework. I want to be careful, however, not to generalize Hartman's method in a way that takes it completely outside of its original context. For Hartman, critical fabulation emerged as a necessary approach when confronting the gaps and violences of archives that document Black lives and the lives of the "subaltern, dispossessed, and enslaved."[15] This method, then, is best suited to creating work that engages with marginalized peoples and communities, not, as Hartman reminds us, as an effort to give voice to those peoples and communities, but rather to work both with and against research materials in order to "imagine what cannot be verified."[16] This method was particularly well suited to the aims and intentions of *Poverty Archive* but could be used in other contexts and other kinds of projects as well. I will now describe specific exercises used by Morales and Traber during the rehearsal process for *Poverty Archives*. Each of these exercises translate into instructional approaches that can be used in the library instruction classroom.

Reaching Back to the Library

As mentioned above, *Poverty Archive* was created as a devised theatre piece. Devising, as a method of performance making, lends itself particularly well to creative research processes as well as to instruction in creating research-driven performance works. As Nista puts it, devising is "the serendipitous browsing of theatre," requiring artists to search for materials to use as the basis for creating a performance, rather than relying on a pre-existing script. Morales and Traber's research-oriented approach to making this devised piece required multiple layers of, and approaches to, instruction. Morales and Traber used instructional strategies during the creation of the piece both in terms of teaching the student-artists specific exercises and approaches to creating performance from research materials, and in terms of teaching the students how to conduct creative research in general for future replication. In this particular project, the research was conducted and introduced to the students by Morales and Traber due to time constraints and the sensitivity of the materials they were working with. As Traber puts it:

> [For] us, in our process, the research moved a little more towards facilitator led. [The] content of this [was] going to be a little more controlled by us. Some of that was about time, some of that was about wanting to guard against appropriation.

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15. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.
16. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.

Montoya confirms this:

> [A] lot of the time, the research was already presented to us in a way that could be performed. […] A lot of it was us internalizing information that we had got in from Kirya and Alicia and then seeing the ways in which it manifested in our movement, or trying to process what the experience of those people at the time could have been, and incorporating that into the performance. But I think you, Kirya, and Alicia did a lot of work to already have that presented for us[.]

Although the students were not active participants in the library and archival research for the project, the materials sourced by Morales and Traber played a strong role in the development of the script. This included work with archival images and documents, library texts, and non-library sources brought in by the students.

One particularly impactful method of instruction used by Morales and Traber was their conducting of a research-informed walking tour of the sites around Washington Square Village where the show's vignettes were set, including the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory (now an NYU-owned building), the Stonewall bar, the site where the New York Women's House of Detention once stood, and the site of the Potter's Field at Washington Square Park (under which lies the bodies of approximately 20,000 people who were considered poor, indigent, or otherwise unworthy of remembrance in the late eighteenth century). Each of the students I interviewed spoke at length about the impact the tour had on them. Undergraduate stage manager, Molly Litvin, explained:

> [W]e spoke about the historical context of Washington Square Park, and then the Potter's Field. Then we traveled to the Women's Detention Center on Sixth Avenue. We went to Stonewall. And just learning about the history surrounding NYU. That tour, I think, was referenced the most in our work in the room, because the actors really got to experience it and discuss it. Because they were learning not just information, but they were also having an embodied experience.[17]

Echoing this, Montoya told me:

> I think what helped me get the connection is there was this time that they took us out on kind of like a field trip. And we walked around to all of these different places that we were mentioning in the show as a part

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17. Molly Litvin (student stage manager) in discussion with the author, April 2024. All subsequent quotes attributed to Litvin are drawn from this conversation.

of the history of the area. And I think that really allowed me to connect things for the performance.

Performer Senia Langston's sentiments are similar to those expressed by Litvin and Montoya yet add an additional dimension:

> We went to Washington Square Park at […] the burial site where they have that little plaque. And they were like, [there's all the bodies.] So, yeah, it was very helpful, because I think for us, it specifically made it a lot more real. […] We knew that these were based on real things that we were talking about, but I think just going to these sites made it even more real to be like, wow, there were people inside of these buildings, there are people buried underneath Washington Square Park, which is crazy. And I tried to think about that because it kind of freaks me out. And also, that there's just this tiny little plaque that's like: oh, these bodies are here. [T]hat's what they deserve? I don't think so. So, I think it just makes it maybe a little more sad, but also it made me even that much more passionate about telling these stories, because these are real people's stories. Just because their names aren't in the show doesn't mean their stories don't matter.[18]

Langston's reaction to the tiny plaque documenting the bodies buried under the park demonstrates a critical orientation to how such histories are memorialized and archived.

The walking tour encouraged the student-artists to use sensory information alongside knowledge gained from research to engage in an "imagining of what might have been said or done," to use Hartman's words. Traber recalls the tour as being an "imaginative, sensory visualization of the history they just heard and the place they actually are." This is an example of Morales and Traber modelling not only the importance of research (in that they carefully researched and shared the history of each of the sites with the students) but also how to use research during the creative process (as an informed mode of sensing, embodying, and imagining). As Litvin attests, the students were most receptive to using research gleaned from the walking tour because, in addition to gaining historically accurate and well-researched information, they did so in an embodied way, gaining a felt sense of place and history. It is unsurprising that this tour was at the root of so much of what happened in the rehearsal room, as Litvin reported. The orderly, formal space of the library classroom makes it easy to forget that

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18. Senia Langston in conversation with the author, May 2024. All subsequent quotes attributed to Langston are drawn from this conversation.

scholar-artists are required, as part of their training, to process information in sensory ways. What might it look like if, instead, in certain circumstances, library instruction sessions were to take place outside of the library classroom and in spaces that might help student-artists learn methods for using research to enhance their sensory and embodied understanding of place?

Part of Morales and Traber's success at generating excitement in the students for the process of conducting research as artist-scholars was likely due to an expanded sense of what they might consider research materials. In addition to using library and archival materials to create *Poverty Archive*, Morales and Traber also encouraged the students to conduct research by way of their personal experiences and use of personally-sourced documents. This intermixing of formal and personal sources resonates with Hartman's call to "displace the received or authorized account."[19]

One of the modes of non-library research that was conducted during the making of *Poverty Archive* was biographical or what Traber referred to as "personal archive research." All of the students I talked with told me about how their family histories informed their work on the show. Langston told me about a monologue she had written for one of the characters she played in the show: a Black woman working at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, the site of a fire in 1911 that killed nearly 150 garment workers. The character is opposed to efforts to unionize the factory, fearing for her livelihood. In writing the monologue, Langston drew on her grandmother's history of union activism at the auto factory where she worked. Her grandmother's history gave her a fuller understanding of the character despite their differing stances on unionization. As she told me:

> She reminded me a lot of my grandma because my grandma, she worked in […] a car company and she also was in a union. And a lot of what this scene was about was them talking about wanting to unionize and my character in the scene doesn't want to do that because she's afraid of what that could mean, especially being a Black woman. She was afraid of unionizing. […] My grandma was in the union, and she did go on strike a lot so a lot of those things came up for me as I was like writing and acting it out.

Similarly, Litvin drew on her parents' experience and memories of living in New York City pre-Stonewall:

> [M]y parents, they were a big resource because they lived in the city since [before Stonewall]. So I would ask them, and my dad was like,

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19. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.

oh, yeah, […] you know, [there used to be] a bagel shop [there] instead of Stonewall.[20]

In one exercise that Morales and Traber used to devise the vignette exploring experiences of poverty at NYU in the present, the performers were given the option of bringing in documents and emails they had received from NYU's financial aid office and the US's Federal Financial Aid office during their time as students. As Morlaes recounts:

[W]e invited people to […], with their own comfort, send in their own financial aid, communication, emails, some of which were award letters, some of which were like, yes, you can have special access because you've proven that you're poor. So, you get extra dining card or whatever. So, some of [it is] quite personal, you know?

Litvin remembers:

When working on that scene together, we brought in all the emails, and then we were given a list of phrases that came out of those emails. And then we were challenged to create scenes using the language that was on the page and to make some sense of it. But there was not a lot of sense to be made out of a lot of these phrases. But I do remember that that was a particular moment of community because we were like: that happened to you too? It was a moment of being able to relate to each other and then really using our own experience with financial aid to inform the scenes and the movement that we started playing with.

In these examples, the student-researchers were given the opportunity to critically engage with the notion of authority in terms of understanding that authority is constructed and contextual—as the Framework for Information Literacy reminds us—as well as in terms of recognizing that even that which is accepted as authoritative (documentation written by a US government agency, for example) may obfuscate as much as it reveals. In quite literally displacing the words from the financial aid communications they had received, the students gained practice in challenging and responding creatively to authorized accounts that omit or constrain a fuller understanding. In using personal histories and materials to do this, Morales and Traber brought attention to an important aspect of teaching creative research to student-artists: recognizing that not everything

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20. Shortly after the 1969 uprising, The Stonewall Inn went out of business and its Christopher Street location was leased by a variety of businesses before it was restored in the 1990s.

they need can or will be found in the library or archive. Artistic research requires engagement with the outside world and with artists' own histories and lived experiences. In the context of the library classroom it is imperative that we recognize the wide variety of materials artist-researchers draw on that together contribute to a critical, research-informed mode of creating.

Hartman's method of representing a sequence of events "in divergent stories and from contested points of view" as part of the practice of critical fabulation results in what Hartman describes as a looping, recombinant narrative that "weaves present, past, and future."[21] This suggests a mode of creating that is capable of making new connections across time and space by refusing the linear approach to past-present-future that informs the organization of many archival materials, research methods, and traditional historical narratives. The approach to working with research materials that Morales and Traber modeled to the students they mentored during *Poverty Archives* operated very much in this way. The walking tour of the Village described above hints at this approach. During the walking tour, time and space collapsed insofar as the Washington Square Park Potter's Field of the 1780s, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory of the 1910s and the Stonewall of the 1960s were brought into connection with each other as well as with the students' present sensory experiences of them. As Morales puts it:

> The whole intro [of the production], the sensory piece was an accurate description of the neighborhood. This is there now, this is what was there. […] So, there was a mapping that brought the geography piece through different time periods.

This looping and remixing of time and space carried into both the devising process and the production itself. From the student perspective, Langston shared:

> [T]hey laid out text for us to look at. And they also laid out photos of what the time look[ed] like […] and they would play music, which I thought was very cool, because it got you in the zone of what this world feels like. And [the sound designer], he played his soundscape and that was really helpful. [T]hat really informed the movement because there was really an everyday there's a tempo [of] everyday life […] in the city.

This layering of place and time as well as of different kinds of research materials (archival documents and photographs layered with soundscapes and music) resonated with the student-artists, permitting both an intellectual and embodied sense of the places and times the show was shaped around. Langston again:

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21. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," p12.

> I feel like [adding music and soundscapes] definitely goes well with learning the historical facts about everything. I think that was something that we also wanted to remember while telling these stories because it is important to [create] fully fleshed out humans, fully fleshed out human stories, not just the contents of a plaque.

In the space of rehearsal and performance, this approach to time and place enabled students to make connections and reveal similarities between different times and places that could not have been made had Morales and Traber hewed to a linear narrative mode. In the space of the library classroom we can encourage artist-researchers to bring these perspectives to bear on library and archival materials by both teaching and pointing out the shortcomings of the orderly and linear methods by which such materials are organized.

Continuing the Dance

As I hope the above shows, working with Morales and Traber on *Poverty Archive* gave both me and the students involved a wealth of new insights. It was clear based on my conversations with the students that they took with them a stronger and more practical sense of what making research-informed performance entails and looks like. As for myself, although I was already familiar with Hartman's work, I had not seen it explicitly used in the context of performance. I came away with an understanding of a new-to-me method of making research-informed performance and practical approaches to teaching that method in the space of the library classroom. I found a different approach to answering the question of how to teach students methods for making research-informed performance: working directly with the artist-mentors that students are particularly keen to learn from. There were, however, limitations to this work.

One of the limitations is that the demanding schedule of the average university production season doesn't allow artist-mentors sufficient time to involve students more directly in their research processes. Adding to this, academic drama and theatre departments are typically called upon to demonstrate their value to the larger university and to local communities by focusing on making fully realized productions, which doesn't easily allow for more experimental work such as devised theatre. When asked how research materials were incorporated into the rehearsal process, Litvin shared:

> [T]here were so many moving parts that I think it was really difficult to focus on the […] research because a lot of rehearsal was about movement, just getting the actors comfortable moving. So that, honestly, that

took up half of rehearsal. So, the second half was all about script genera-
tion. […] And so I think we were trying to cram so much in so little time,
that I don't think we dedicated as much time as we had hoped [to the
research materials] in the actual rehearsal room.

Traber expressed similar sentiments:

[Focusing more on research] would have taken more time. The momen-
tum of making the show took over a bit and became the focus. […] I think
for the project overall, a little less pressure to have a finished product
would have probably served everybody.

Nearly all of the participants I spoke with expressed concern that research-
informed devising processes simply weren't—and perhaps couldn't be—com-
patible with Tisch Drama's production season. One interviewee confided, "Yeah,
I mean, it was an experiment for the department to do devising. I don't think
they're going to do that again."

Because of the demands of researching, generating, and staging a research-
informed devised piece within a six-week rehearsal period, there was a limit to
how much students could learn about research during the process. Although
many students were excited by Morales and Traber's research process, the mate-
rials they brought to rehearsals, and the exercises they used to bring those mate-
rials to life, there was not enough time for the students to engage in searching for
materials on their own. One student, for example, shared that they "didn't get to
do a lot of research at the time" but that "it would be fun to look through those
records and discover things for myself." Here and at several other points dur-
ing our conversation the same student expressed greater interest in conducting
library and archival research as part of their own performance-making practice,
but simultaneously expressed concern that they were underprepared to do so:

I wish I knew how to use the library. I really don't quite know how to
find the things there, even though I'm sure the system is very clear if I
gave it more of a shot. I tend to use libraries as places for me to study.
[…] For my creative research, though, I find myself using online sources
[like Google].

Similarly, another student told me that the research materials Morales and Traber
brought into the rehearsal room "made it a lot more real" but also confided that
their own research "tends to be a lot of me going on YouTube to find videos."
Working on *Poverty Archive* stimulated the students' excitement about working
with library and archival materials and helped them learn how to incorporate

such materials into their own practice. Because of the short rehearsal period, however, students were not able to participate directly in the research process and therefore did not gain as many new skills for conducting research themselves as they might otherwise have.

Despite these limitations, I consider many aspects of the collaboration to have been a success. Most of all, I am excited by the degree to which the students expressed interest in continuing to create research-informed work. During our conversation, Traber told me:

> You should put this in your research that it activated all of their thinking about how they frame what they see in a historical context, how they framed what they see from a class-based context, and how the language they use and the sources they draw from shapes what they want to communicate. They're still talking about that in their own work. We've seen that since then. Even though we didn't walk them into the library and look through the archive with them, we did bring our research-based — whether it's embodied research or book research, interview research — we brought that perspective to them, and it definitely shifted them.

That the students had been shifted by the process of working on *Poverty Archive* and that it had impacted their own work was confirmed by the students themselves. After working on the show, a number of students worked together on a research-informed devised production—led by Montoya and titled *AlieNYU*—that delved into the alienation that students who have experienced poverty feel at NYU. Montoya, Litvin, and Langston all shared with me that working on *Poverty Archive* deeply informed their work on that piece and that working with a multiplicity of research materials was a central part of that. Although I still work to connect with as many Drama students as possible knowing I'll likely never be able to offer library instruction to all of them, processes like these give me hope that there are organic and scalable methods for reaching them nonetheless.

Critical fabulation is only one out of a constellation of research-based creation methods used by artist-mentors in the rehearsal room as they work with student artist-researchers. Working collaboratively with Morales and Traber enabled me to understand critical fabulation as a teachable method and to add this to my set of strategies for teaching research for creative practice in the library classroom. Based on this experience, I strongly encourage other performing arts librarians to work closely and openly with artist-mentors and support them in articulating their methods and in using library resources. This enables artist-mentors to do the work of teaching research-informed creation to students in the spaces in which those students are most open to learning. This also allows us, as librarians, to learn the many and varied methods artist-mentors use to

create research-informed work. These methods can then be brought back into the library classroom, deepening students' understanding of the methods used by their artist-mentors and strengthening their work with those mentors in the space of the rehearsal room and stage. In so doing, the library classroom becomes a more engaging space where librarians, artist-mentors, and students can experiment with making research dance together.

Acknowledgments

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