THESIS

QUESTIONING THE CARNIVALESQUE:
POETRY SLAMS, PERFORMANCE, AND CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF RESISTANCE

Submitted by

Isaac Richard Freitas

Department of Sociology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Fall 2012

Master's Committee:

    Advisor: Lynn Hempel

    Pete Taylor
    Greg Dickinson

ABSTRACT

QUESTIONING THE CARNIVALESQUE:

POETRY SLAMS, PERFORMANCE, AND CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF RESISTANCE

This thesis explores the form that resistance takes in poetry slams. In this study, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival is applied to the poetry slam as a contemporary form of resistance. Carnival provides a place outside of everyday life where different rules are in effect. Through the carnival, participants see new possibilities for their everyday lives. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate whether poetry slams show carnivalesque resistance.

Research was conducted using a hermeneutic perspective. The data was collected through observation and interviews with subjects at two poetry slams: the Open Counter Poetry Slam and the Rue Vermilion Poetry Slam. Observations were conducted at multiple occurrences of each slam. Thirteen individuals were interviewed with eight coming from the Open Counter Poetry Slam and five from the Rue Vermilion Poetry Slam. Thematic analysis was used in interpreting the data.

Two approaches were used to examine the results of the analysis. A spatial approach was used to see how the times and spaces that poetry slams occur show carnival resistance. The second approach used the perspectives of the interviewees and observations of poetry slam participants' interactions to explore carnival's role in poetry slam events. By showing how carnival manifests within poetry slams, this research shows how events can provide safe havens from the pressures of power that permeate the social hierarchies of everyday life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

"All the acts of the drama of world history were performed before a chorus of the
laughing people. Without hearing this chorus we cannot understand the drama as
a whole." (Bakhtin 1968:474)

A name rings out from the speaker, calling up a person who put pen to paper list asking for a

position to perform in a poetry slam. Standing up in the back of the venue, then wending a way

between crowded tables, chairs, and standing audience, the poet takes the stage. Nervous hands

crinkle pages while the mouth forms syllables, words, sentences, and entire poems in an oral

display of talent spit into the microphone for the whole crowd to hear. The poet takes advantage

of the platform provided by the poetry slam to contest and defend, deride and praise, to laugh

and to rage. Poets engage with topics of race, gender, discrimination, politics, failed love, or any

topic—sacred or profane—that they desire while they stand upon the stage with the microphone

before their lips and the crowd waiting to respond in front of them. Ears waiting for feedback

hear the sudden cheer as the last stanza fades. With the poem's performance completed, the poet

finds a way back into the audience to sit, listen, and offer verbal accolades to the next

performances.

Poetry slams have been described as a means to "address the modern human condition by

bringing to life...personal, political, social and spiritual concerns while knocking the socks off an

audience through the artful and entertaining application of performance" (Smith and Kraynak

2009:5). Poetry slams are competitions that welcome performers regardless of their skills or

status, providing a place for people coming from diverse circumstances and backgrounds to take

the stage to elocute about matters that are a part of their everyday existences. A common saying with poetry slams is that "the points are not the point, the point is poetry" (Smith and Kraynak 2009:19). This saying highlights the view that although competition is important to the poetry slam, the performances provide an opportunity for more to occur. Poetry slams are not simply about a struggle for dominance through winning or dictating the terms by which poetry should be judged. The competition provides a format for performers to say something about which they feel deeply, gain feedback from judges' scoring, and hear the reactions of the audience. Poetry slams were started as a way to bring vitality back into poetry performance events that were perceived as having grown into stale poetry readings composed of academics and their literary companions (Smith and Kraynak 2009:18). Poetry slams were meant to become a way to give a voice back to the masses to decide for themselves what they wanted to hear and express in poetry. The question remains, though, whether poetry slams represent a form of resistance.

Contemporary scholars have increasingly studied how resistance occurs in society. Many scholars draw on the works of Marxists and post-structural understandings of power to propound that resistance can happen in the everyday actions and thoughts of ordinary people (Rubin 1995:238). The broad definition of resistance which underlies this approach can be stated as: "any action that opposes the pressures of power" (Rubin 1995:244). Considerable debate has occurred on what degree everyday resistance can affect changing power structures and challenge oppression. Scholarship on resistance has been criticized as uncritically giving exaggerated significance to certain everyday actions by labeling them as resistance (Rubin 1995:239; Morris 2004:679). Both Rubin (1995:256) and Morris (2004:679) identify the need to recognize limits to which the concept of resistance should be held. When studying an activity that can be

interpreted as an everyday form of resistance, more must be done to explain why and how that resistance occurs, or, alternatively, whether resistance is not occurring.

With this broader debate over resistance in mind, the poetry slam's potential for resistance will be studied using Bakhtin's concept of the carnival. Mikhail Bakhtin conceived of carnival as a form of resistance. Carnival provides a time and place where the existing social order becomes 'uncrowned' and inverted through the practices of the participants allowing laughter and critique to challenge the dominant discourses (Gardiner 2000:65). Carnival relies on the participation of everyone at the event to create an alternative social order so that people can relate to each other on an equal basis during the carnival time. The potential for resistance in the carnival will be questioned. How well does the poetry slam fulfill the attributes of the carnival? On the other hand, how is the carnival contradicted by practices in poetry slams?

The Basic Format of the Poetry Slam

Before delving into the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis, the basic format of the poetry slam will be outlined. Poetry slams can be complex events and can operate according to different rules depending on the location and on the particular occurrence. The description of the poetry slam below reflects the general format that many poetry slams follow. Further elaboration on the operation of poetry slams will be examined as they become relevant to the discussion throughout the study.

Poetry slams are competitive events for the oral performance of poetry. Poetry slams are recurring events that can occur monthly or weekly, depending on the venue and the local organization of the event. Poetry slams often follow a similar format. A signup sheet is put out for prospective performers to write their names to reserve a place in the competition (Smith and Kraynak 2009:39). Usually twelve to fifteen poets is the upper limit to how many can perform at

each poetry slam. Each of the poets will have a chance to perform a poem and be scored by the judges. Their scores will determine how far they go in the competition. Poetry slams have three rounds of competition. All of the poets who signed up get to perform in the first round. The six poets who scored the highest in the first round get to move on to the second round. The three top scoring poets from the second round get a chance to perform in the third round and win the poetry slam. Typically a reward will be given to the winner of the poetry slam. The type of reward depends on the context of the local poetry slams. Some give a twenty dollar gift card while others will take cash donations during the event all of which they give to the winner (Smith and Kraynak 2009:46).

At a poetry slam competition, judges are required to give scores for each of the poetry performances. Five judges are chosen as volunteers from the poetry slam audience (Smith and Kraynak 2009:40). Judges do not need to have any expertise in poetry. Anyone from a first time poetry slam attendee to a literary scholar could volunteer to be a judge. The scoring of the poetry slam is fairly simple. Each judge gives a score between zero and ten to for each performance. The highest score and the lowest score are dropped and the three scores in the middle will be added together for a total score out of thirty points. After each performance, the poetry slam host asks for judges to hold up their score. A scorekeeper assists the host in writing down the scores and doing the math to get the final score out of thirty points.

Research Questions

Are poetry slams carnivalesque forms of resistance? The concept of the carnival provides a form through which resistance can be conceived. For this thesis, I intend to study poetry slams as a site of carnivalesque resistance. Creating a space outside of the everyday is an important component of carnival. Does the poetry slam create a space for resistance to take

place? How does the poetry slam compare to the everyday uses of the same space? Poetry slams share certain attributes with the carnival. As with carnivals, poetry slams seemingly invert social hierarchies. Performances at poetry slam often invoke ambivalent, resistant laughter which is essential to the carnival. Also, just as in Bakhtin's carnival, everyone participates in one fashion or another. Do these attributes contribute to seeing the poetry slam as carnivalesque resistance? Does the carnival necessarily entail resistance? Performances might not all contribute equally to the carnival atmosphere or might counteract it in some way. Are there limits to the effectiveness of discussing carnival as a form of resistance in the poetry slam? Through a close study and comparison of two different poetry slam series, we will gather and analyze information to help understand how poetry slams relate to the carnival.

Building the Dialogue

The theoretical underpinnings of carnivalesque resistance require further explanation to answer the questions posed. In this thesis, I present the theoretical concepts of dialogue and the carnival. These concepts are used to analyze data gathered from the poetry slam through observation and interviews. Once the analysis is completed, conclusions will be made regarding the question of whether poetry slams are carnivalesque forms of resistance.

In Chapter Two, a Bakhtinian framework for understanding resistance is shown beginning with the concepts of dialogue and dialogic action then progressing to carnival. Criteria are outlined that must be met to constitute a carnival and the initial case is made for the poetry slam as an event where carnivalesque resistance occurs.

Subsequently in Chapter Three, the methodological reasoning and practices used to collect data is discussed. The hermeneutic approach described was used to guide the research process. Two poetry slam cases were studied through observations and by interviewing

participants. The data gathered was then interpreted through the theoretical framework previously discussed in Chapter Two.

A two-pronged analysis of the data takes place in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Four looks at the spatial attributes of the Open Counter Poetry Slam while comparing it to the use of the space during everyday business operations. The ways that people use the objects and physical attributes of the poetry slam's location is examined to find evidence for resistance. Chapter Five analyzes the political, social, and cultural attributes of the poetry slam that may contribute to carnivalesque resistance. In Chapter Six, the final conclusions on the role of carnival in the poetry slam are presented based on the evidence gathered. Taken together, each of these pieces will contribute to both a greater understanding of carnival as a form of contemporary resistance and knowledge of the poetry slam culture.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

"And as though there were a particular secret access unto knowledge, which was
obstructed for those who learn something—we believe in the folk and their
'wisdom'. But this is what all poets believe, that he who is lying in the grass or by
lonely slopes and pricketh up his ears, learneth something about the things which
are between heaven and earth. And when feeling amorous emotions, the poets
ever think that nature herself is in love with them." (Nietzsche 1896:180)

To piece together a better picture of the practice of resistance within poetry slams, we must

develop a theoretical framework of concepts that can be used to interpret the findings of this

study. The broad topic of resistance will be narrowed down to look at the concept of carnival in

Bakhtin's theory. Bakhtin's work is often used to conceptualize aspects of everyday life and the

ways that people communicate. Much of his published work lies in the realm of literary

criticism yet his analyses also push into the realms of philosophy, anthropology, and sociology

providing a dynamic view of how people operate. The three main concepts, dialogue, the act, and

carnival, will be used to illustrate how ordinary people can be involved in a particular form of

resistance. Each of those three concepts will be outlined and explained below. Since dialogue

provides the foundation for discussing Bakhtin's theory, it will be examined first. This will then

be followed by a brief discussion of Bakhtin's philosophy of the act. Building off the two other

concepts, the carnival will be discussed as a form of resistance.

Dialogue

Dialogue has been called the central organizing feature of Bakhtin's corpus of work (Baxter 2004:108). To discuss dialogue, one must first emphasize the distinction between monologues and dialogues. A monologic utterance would be one-sided, allowing for only one point of view to be expressed (Baxter and Montgomery 1996:45). Monologue also does not allow for a response to an utterance that has been made (Nielsen 2000:157). Monologic communication privileges one side of the topic without acknowledging the opposite perspective waiting to be expressed. Monologues result from the monopolization of a discussion by those with power thus excluding the less powerful from expressing their opinions in the conversation. Theorists like Pierre Bourdieu discuss how larger amounts of cultural and economic capital that some people have access to give them greater control in dictating cultural tastes and preferences (Bourdieu 1986). Those with greater control of a field such as that of literature would be able to say what kinds of poetry are acceptable and which are not. This would conform to a monologic construction of culture. Gilman's (2009) study of Malawian political rallies provides another example of monologues. Political rallies were orchestrated by politicians and their parties to control the speeches and performances so they could remain uncontested and reinforce the message of their dominance (Gilman 2009:339). The political rally organizers relied on their economic and political dominance to exclude others from expressing their opinions, thus maintaining monologic control of the discourse at the event.

Conversely, in dialogue, the opinion of the other side of the topic is recognized and anticipated in the communication. The preeminence of dialogue rises out of Bakhtin's conception of how the self forms. For Bakhtin, the self only comes into existence by recognizing and taking on the view of the other. Bakhtin wrote, "Two voices is the minimum for life, the

minimum for existence" (Bakhtin 1973:213). Once the viewpoint of the other has been recognized, the self comes back to itself taking into account the distinction between the self and other (Bakhtin, Holquist, and Liapunov 1990:129). Bakhtin's understanding of the formation of the self shares a similar construction to that of Mead, although the two scholars likely did not encounter each other's work (Nielsen 2000:143). Both men described the self coming into being through its relationship to the other. For Bakhtin, the constitution of the self never finalizes yet continues in an on-going state of becoming (Gardiner 2002:165). Unfinalizability means that the self is never a static fixed entity but is in flux, changing based on continued interaction between the individual and the other. Dialogic communication operates in the same way, allowing the expression of opposition and incorporating the view of the other within its own message (Nielsen 2000:157-8). Dialogue requires that the other has a voice in the discussion and that the conversation does not finalize based on the desires of just one side.

Dialogue presupposes a perspective of the world that "stresses continual interaction and interconnectedness, relationality, and the permeability of both symbolic and physical boundaries" (Gardiner 2000:57). People cannot be said to have existed as preconstituted monads but have come into being through relations with other people and things in a process that is never finalized. The ecological protests studied by Hufford (2010) demonstrate a dialogic process whereby the corporations and the state who advocate for the extraction of coal find their messages about the positive economic benefits of coal contested by protesters who counter with messages about the ecological and social damage done by the coal industry. As each side makes their case, they must anticipate the message of the other side and address the meaning thus projected through a retaliatory message of their own. Both sides of this dialogue are connected

together by their concerns about the coal extraction industry and their relations to the coal, the local populations, and state governments.

Dialogue could be gainfully applied to the study of poetry slams. Poetry slams require performers to present poetry in a competitive format. The poets who go up to perform have to take into account the reaction of the audience and the five judges randomly chosen out of the audience responsible for scoring the presentations. The poets' performances can attempt to take into account the other, represented by the judges and the audience, when choosing the content and the style of the performance. Poetry slams are seemingly set up so any one poet cannot go up and dominate the event monologically without consequences. The judges are brought into dialogue with the performers through their scoring of the performances.   Poets that have higher scores get to go on into the next rounds of the competition while those who do not have earned general feedback to take into account for future performances. The audience also provides their reaction in the dialogue of performance through the noise which they make during and after the performance. The audience can clap, cheer, boo, or verbalize their positive or negative evaluations to let the poet know how their performance has been received.

The judges similarly remain in dialogue with the audience. The judge's scores are greeted by the audiences' boos and cheers. If the audience does not like the score a particular judge has given, the audience can boo that judge. Poetry slam hosts exhort their audiences to be engaged in the process of the competitions by verbalizing their opinions. The hosts keep the dialogue open and progressing throughout the event as well as making sure the event continues to move along. This ensures the performers have a chance to show their stuff and have a chance to move through the three rounds of the competition. These are just a few examples of the dialogic composition of poetry slams which could make resistance a possibility.

While the ideal for Bakhtin was for dialogic discourse to occur, monologues can still occur. Performers do not necessarily have to take into account the perspective of the other presented by the audience and judges. Performers who act this way most likely will not make it past that round of competition, but indulging in a monologic performance could be possible. Also, the person in the position of the host of the event can control the event to a certain degree. One host I have witnessed often performs a piece of his own poetry between the first and second rounds of the poetry slam. The host could potentially be interpreted as behaving monologically to perform his own piece without participating as a competitor in the poetry slam. The possibility of monologue occurring would detract from an interpretation of the poetry slam as being a dialogic example of resistance. While the poetry slam may contain more dialogue than monologue, interpreting the poetry slam as resistant requires more nuance when this is recognized.

Bakhtin and the Act

Dialogue provides a solid base for building the theoretical framework, but to further progress, dialogue must be put into action. According to a Bakhtinian approach, "life must be understood as a continuous series of singular acts, and each act, or 'event', must be grasped on its own terms" (Gardiner 2000:47). Actions are realized in specific circumstances of space, time, and culture. As discussed above, the self can only come into being through relating to the other. This relating takes concrete form in the actions of the individual (Gardiner 2000:51). Practices are inherently relational because each person's actions towards each other are "embodied, situated in concrete time/space, and saturated with normative evaluations" (Gardiner 2000:52). A person's actions are considered constituent moments of a person's life that become part of the ongoing process of becoming.

This view of acting is *dialogical*. A person's actions make connections with the surrounding context of the room and moment's that they occur in, yet also are connected to larger contexts of time/space (chronotopes) in which they occur, whether that be the era of modernity or being in the state of Colorado (Voloshinov 1994:164)). Bakhtin's theory advocates for action to occur in an intersubjective mode of relation where people's actions draw on the general social context to situate their behavior dialogically. This situating of the individual's behavior occurs in a similar manner to that described by Goffman. Goffman (1959:6) theorized that when an individual performs actions in front of others, he will influence the definition of the situation for himself and the others in that context. Bakhtin deprecates the monological forms of acting towards others, instead favoring dialogical relations. People should relate to each other dialogically, acknowledging others as a subject and not an object. When people relate to others as objects, they are no longer co-participants in everyday life, essentially denying the humanity of the other by unilaterally taking action without recognizing the thoughts of others. Dialogue involves communication where each side is regarded as a subject whose needs must also be considered. Bakhtin emphasizes the dialogic nature of the carnival in particular including the carnival practices which people act out.

While dialogic action and relations require people to acknowledge each other as subjects, monologic action is still possible (Bakhtin 1986:161). As mentioned earlier, Gilman's (2009) study of Malawian political rallies showed that the politicians and their organizers attempted to engage in monologic action to control the meaning portrayed at their event. Gilman also pointed out that the monologic control was not total and dialogue managed to penetrate the event through protesters and other mishaps. On the other hand, poetry slams may appear dialogic in the practices and actions of its participants, but monologic action could still occur. For carnival to

be viewed as a form of resistance, dialogic relations should predominate the practices of the event.

Carnival

Carnival relies on dialogue as the foundation from which this conception of resistance is built. The concept of carnival was developed through Bakhtin's analyses of the works of Dostoevsky and Rabelais (Bakhtin 1968; Bakhtin 1973). Bakhtin drew upon the example of the medieval carnival in Rabelais and other works to construct the concept of the carnival. Bakhtin characterized the medieval carnival as "the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life" (Bakhtin 1968:8). Within the carnival an inversion of the social order occurred in which "life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part" (Bakhtin 1968:7). The laws and prohibitions of ordinary everyday life are suspended to allow for "a 'free and familiar' mode of social interaction which eschews notions of difference, such as those based on race, class, or gender allowing room for other voices to be heard (Gardiner 1992:30).

During the carnival time period, everyone lives according to a "new modus of interrelationship of man with man" based on the carnival attitude (Bakhtin 1973:101). This new mode of relating allows people to interact freely without reference to the normal social hierarchies of non-carnival life. For a type of literature or event to take on the carnival attitude, it must become carnivalized. Carnivalization occurs over time with the aspects of the local carnival folk culture penetrating into the genre of literature or the type of event being studied (Bakhtin 1973:112). Carnival is characterized by the participation of everyone present with no one being left out. Stam (1989:94) points out that a carnival can be viewed as a participatory

13

spectacle, "a 'pageant without footlights' which erases the boundaries between spectator and performer." The people in a carnival behave and act towards one another without reference to the social hierarchies of their non-carnivalistic lives, instead behaving inappropriately according to the rules of normal non-carnival life (Bakhtin 1973:101).

Bakhtin goes so far as to state "carnival brings together, unites, weds and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the lowly, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid, etc." (Bakhtin 1973:101). This quote presents contradictory pairs of ideas that Bakhtin asserts the carnival brings together in a dialogic manner. The dialogic unification of opposites allows for equal participation because the privileged sides of pairs get mixed with the profane parts of ordinary non-carnival life. This unification of opposites allows participants to creatively and playful engage with one another in a carnivalesque manner. It highlights the fluidity of the carnival social order that differs from the social order of everyday life. Tied to this aspect of carnival is the profanation involved in creating the carnival atmosphere. With the inversion of hierarchy and the disregard shown to status and privilege in a carnival, many things that are held as sacred in ordinary life have their status lowered and brought down to earth through the mocking of sacred rituals, ideas, and values.

One means by which profanation and inversion occurred was through the patterns of familiar speech which people in the carnival used. With the free and familiar mode of interacting in place during the carnival, people are also free to express themselves in more vulgar terms. Bakhtin refers to people speaking in "various genres of bilingsgate", meaning that people used profanity and oaths to talk to and about each other (Bakhtin 1968:16). Rather than being insulting, the profane speech had an ambivalent tone of laughter within them. The ambivalence of the laughter allows the profane speech to be both mockingly irreverent and, at

the same time, jovially inclusive (Bakhtin 1968:16). Through the inversion of hierarchy and the carnival disregard for status, people can then interact freely in this manner with carnivalized thoughts and values guiding their interactions.

Carnival as Critical Utopia

Carnival may be interpreted as expressing a critical utopia. A critical utopia differs from the Enlightenment-inspired utopias where society conforms to a homeostatic blueprint of ideal structures. A critical utopia resists systematization and the hegemony associated with traditional utopian thought. Critical utopian thought instead creates a "seditious expression of social change and popular sovereignty carried on in a permanently open process of envisioning which is not yet" (Moylan, quoted in Gardiner 1992:25). Carnival avoids systematization by overturning existing hierarchies and creating a carnivalized mode of interaction which differs from normal life. The critical aspect of carnival provides a means to look at society and re-envision it as more egalitarian and open (Gardiner 1992:25).

Describing carnival as critical does not imply that it involves only tearing down the existing order and being dismissive of everyday society. Rather the carnival is viewed as providing opportunities for seeing different possibilities for change (Gardiner 1992:30). Carnival's ability to achieve social renewal lies in facilitating the recognition that ordinary life does not need to fit a single standard that monologically suppresses difference, but can instead be carried out in a multiplicity of divergent ways (Gardiner 1992:40). This potential to see opportunities for change occurs within the context of the carnival event, yet has implications for life outside of the carnival. Gardiner states that the critical utopia of the carnival allows participants to oppose the dominant social order and see that what is 'real' and exists in everyday life reflects but one possibility (Gardiner 1992:32). A potential exists for the renewal of society

15

through the playful nature of folk culture that manifests through the carnival. For change to occur, people must take advantage of the different possibilities shown within the carnival and work on them in their normal non-carnivalistic lives.

Carnival Practice and Inversion

Stam (1989:93) characterizes carnival as "a living social practice...also a perennial generating fund of popular forms and festive rituals". Forms of interaction may find renewed vitality within the carnival through the experience of critical utopia. Interaction becomes carnivalesque within the carnival time. Carnival exists as an attitude that infests the practices of individuals, pushing them to behave familiarly. For a carnival atmosphere to pervade a situation then, those present must use carnivalesque practices to create and maintain that atmosphere. Carnival becomes a collective experience for those present through participation. Carnival practices do two main things: they take people out of their everyday lives and invert the social order. Carnival practices take people out of everyday life and create an 'other' against which the everyday non-carnival life is comparable. While everyday practice can be oriented towards acquiescing to the needs of the powerful and privileged, carnival practices engage in ambivalent mocking that equalizes the relations of people towards each other.

In the context of the carnival, Bakhtin stated that people's participation during carnival had to follow the rules of the carnival. The rules of the everyday that relied on established patterns of practice with social hierarchies would become inverted and transformed in the carnival time. One of the carnival practices, identified by Bakhtin in his study of Rabelais, was the composition of parodies that mocked the medieval church. This carnival practice saw monks and others of the clergy writing up parodies of the scriptures and official prayers. Another practice was that of the medieval comic theater that saw carnivalesque behaviors acted out before

16

the crowd. Hufford (2010) found a number of other practices in her study of protests against

coal extraction in West Virginia. One practice she identified included protestor's singing

parodies of the state anthem to include lyrics critical of the coal industry's role in harming the

local environment. Other practices included taking slogans that coal industry supporters had on

bumper stickers and putting a twist on the words creating an oppositional message.

The practices in a carnival vary depending on the time/space in which they are realized

and which issues have become more prominent in that context, as can be seen by the difference

between the examples of the medieval carnival with a focus on the church and those of the

contemporary protests against coal extraction. Despite the variation in the particular incarnation

of carnival practices, to be a carnival the social hierarchy needs to be inverted and a

transformation of the practices of social relations must occur. If inversion or transformation does

not occur, then carnival is not being practiced in that context. In studying the poetry slam,

inversion and transformation of social relations needs to be established to credibly apply the

concept of carnival before speaking of the carnival as a form of resistance.

Carnival in the Poetry Slam

Having discussed the concept of carnival, our focus now turns to the concept's

application to the context of the poetry slam. Bakhtin (1968:108) acknowledged that the carnival

did not exist in a pure form in contemporary society like it did in medieval times, but to what

degree can the poetry slam be said to conform to even the degraded form of carnival? The

structure of the poetry slam can be argued to promote dialogue, yet it remains to be seen whether

the carnival exists within the poetry slam. The possibility exists that the poetry slam could be

dialogic without fulfilling the other attributes of the carnival. Carnival also requires an inversion

of the social hierarchy and the familiarization of social relations to ignore differences in power

and prestige. Certain processes of poetry slam such as the judges who score the performances being randomly chosen from audience volunteers at each iteration of the event could be argued to potentially contribute to a carnival atmosphere. The randomness of the selection disallows choosing judges based on any perceived expertise or other social status which could be interpreted as inverting the privileged hierarchy of expertise. How well does this randomness of selection mechanism work to create carnival? Can a more thorough analysis show power relations still prevailing in the actual practices of the poetry slam?

The profanation aspect of carnival provides another avenue of interest. Bakhtin's formulation of the carnival talks about the open mocking of the church and people acting raucously together (1968:14). While the poets performing often curse and degrade privileged topics and ideas, the crowds remain polite, clapping at appropriate times and cheering loudly when they really like something. The politeness of the general interaction between crowd and performer complicates reading inversion into the situation. Carnival as a critical utopia is supposed to open people up to new possibilities for social change, yet the veracity of this claim requires further scrutiny.

The aim of the research will be to examine the relevance of the carnival as a form of resistance to the poetry slam and address associated questions on the themes of dialogue, inversion, profanation, and the transformation of daily life. To apply the theoretical framework discussed here, data had to be acquired. An approach was taken that fit with the theory and that was appropriate for use in the settings the research was conducted. In the next chapter, I detail the methodology adopted for pursuing this study.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

"The exact sciences constitute a monologic form of knowledge: the intellect

contemplates a thing and expounds upon it.... But a subject as such cannot be

perceived and studied as a thing, for as a subject it cannot, while remaining a

subject, become voiceless, and, consequently, cognition of it can only be

dialogic." (Bakhtin 1986:161)

The methodology for this study of resistance in poetry slams aims to conform to the theoretical

approach used to evaluate the subject. Bakhtin's (1986) essay "Methodology for the Human

Sciences", written at the end of his life, points out a few of his methodological concerns. The

position he took, described in the quote above, outlines a hermeneutic approach. Hermeneutics

in sociology is concerned with the meaningful interpretations that people build and rely on in

their social interactions. As discussed in Chapter 2, Bakhtin's theory has an underlying

framework built around dialogue that describes the intersubjective connections between people

that comes out of the hermeneutic tradition which developed in Europe (Gardiner 2002:102).

Bakhtin (1986:169) said "the subject can never become a concept (he himself thinks and

responds)". Bakhtin points to the importance of taking into account the subjective experiences

of people and not treating them as simply objects of study. In this research project, the

participants of the poetry slams were recognized as subjects who brought their own viewpoints to

the table, not treated as objects without a voice to express themselves.

A critical aspect to taking a Bakhtinian approach rests in both the methods and the

interpretation of the data gathered. By triangulating between observations of poetry slams and

the subjective experiences of poetry slam participants, a more complex picture can be illuminated. This will help avoid reifying any singular interpretation while still taking into account the different experiences and subjective positions of the participants. Another component of critique involves the evaluation of existing concepts and theories. While Bakhtin's theory on carnival is an organizing concept of this study, the concept itself will be critically assessed along with other theories. By avoiding taking concepts for granted, I hope to provide a better understanding of how the concepts of resistance, carnival, and poetry slams can be opened up for new interpretations (Gardiner 2002:136-137).

The hermeneutic and critical principles briefly outlined here can be suitably applied by utilizing an ethnographic approach to the study of the poetry slam and the contextual surroundings that influence the practices therein. Ethnography gathers information from different viewpoints through observation, interviews with participants, and other materials to see how the poetry slam is interpreted. In the following sections, I first identify the poetry slams chosen as cases of relevant sites of study. Next, the ethnographic data collection strategies will be outlined along with a justification for this approach. Following that the method of thematic analysis will be described. Finally, the limits of this study will be discussed to establish the boundaries for the research that is being proposed.

Cases

Two poetry slams were selected as cases to be studied: The Rue Vermilion Poetry Slam in Metro City and the Open Counter Poetry Slam in College Town[1]. These events were selected to highlight the continuity that can be seen in the organization of the poetry slam event format as well as the differences that evolve with each unique location and the people who come. The two

---

[1] Pseudonyms have been used to identify persons, places, spaces, and events to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

cases selected share the attribute of creating a venue for local poets to come and perform. Both poetry slams have venues located in or near a downtown area of their respective cities and sell beverages and food to the audience. Poetry slams are dynamic events with performances, conversations, eating, drinking, and moving happening simultaneously. Each case has its own circumstances, however. The Rue Vermilion is located in a larger metropolitan area and the Open Counter is in a college town. Additionally, with the Rue Vermilion being affiliated with Poetry Slam, Inc. to be part of a national competition and the Open Counter Poetry Slam not directly participating with the national competition, there are differences in how the poetry slam is implemented. Using the context for each poetry slam should highlight important characteristics that poetry slams share that can help identify carnivalesque and non-carnivalesque elements of the different poetry slams.

Each of these poetry slams were established a number of years ago and manage to draw in audiences and new performers regularly. The Rue Vermilion Poetry Slam is located near the downtown area of a metropolitan city. Poetry slams are held every Sunday of the month in the Rue Vermilion. The Rue Vermilion is a restaurant, coffeehouse, bar, and entertainment venue all rolled into one. The Open Counter Poetry Slam is located in the downtown area of a robust college town. This poetry slam occurs once on the first Friday of each month at The Open Counter. The Open Counter is a coffeehouse that serves a variety of different drinks such as tea, coffee, hot chocolate, and smoothies along with various baked goods. The Open Counter also contains the nonprofit Aura Bookstore that sells used books of all sorts. The Open Counter Poetry Slam's organizers have an agreement with the store's owners to have the event there every month.

Both the Rue Vermilion and Open Counter Poetry Slams are officially associated with a national poetry slam institution known as Poetry Slam, Inc. This institution organizes the annual National Poetry Slam Competition which many affiliated poetry slams across the country send teams to compete in. Certain rules need to be followed by Poetry Slam, Inc. affiliated poetry slams during their events to qualify to participate in the competition. These rules include time limits on performances, a minimum of 6 events during a poetry slam season (between the National Poetry Slam Competition in August and the next June), and an average audience of 30 (Poetry Slam, Inc. 2007). The Rue Vermilion implements these rules and has had teams compete in the national competition. The Open Counter Poetry Slam, however, up to this point has chosen not to enforce time limit rules, rules against the use of props/costumes, or other requirements.

I attended numerous poetry readings and poetry slams recreationally over a two-year period that first got me interested in these events. I developed an appreciation for these events and began wondering what drew people to them. This led to the organization of this research project. Having attended the Open Counter Slam quite a few times during that period, the level of familiarity developed in my participation could be viewed as opening up the potential for a personal bias because of the interpretations that I have built up through my personal experiences with that event which could color my view of other poetry slam events. In ethnographic participant observation, a balance needs to be maintained between being an insider and an outsider (Brewer 2000:60). Although using an existing role opened up the potential for bias, this issue was addressed by maintaining awareness of the interpretive process and participating critically in the research. By maintaining an attitude of strangeness, I critically engaged with the ordinary aspects of the poetry slam to keep an attitude of attentiveness (Neuman 2006:390). My

existing familiarity with the poetry slam can also be a benefit in recognizing and differentiating the practices in the poetry slam from what I have seen over a period of time. I conducted formal observations of the poetry slams to create notes rather than rely solely on my memories and experiences of previous events. An additional means of counteracting bias from prior experience was to include the Rue Vermilion Poetry Slam which I did not have prior experience attending. Although the contrasting and comparing of the two poetry slams as unique events will not be a primary focus of this research, the extent to which it occurs can put the experiences at each event into perspective for looking at the nature of resistance. Through studying and comparing the two slams, I confronted both the familiar and the unfamiliar, forcing me to confront existing subjective bias through new experiences.

Data Collection

Ethnography was the data collection approach which worked best alongside the Bakhtinian theoretical approach used for this study. Ethnography fits well with the hermeneutic perspective espoused for this research project because of the emphasis on interpreting meaning in the setting of the study. Ethnography is particularly appropriate when done to critically explore issues of power and resistance in how a cultural group behaves (Creswell 2007:71). Critical ethnography looks at the double-edged ability of culture to both oppress and liberate (Thomas 1993:20). This study performs a critical ethnography because it examines the practices of resistance within poetry slams. To understand the practice of resistance and the form it takes in poetry slams, ethnography provides the ideal choice. Ethnography fits well into the hermeneutic and critical theoretical framework that has been chosen.

Four general forms of data can be collected for ethnography: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell 2007:130). The use of multiple data collection

techniques allows for a process of triangulation. My research on poetry slams and the carnival benefits from the multiple viewpoints provided by using both observation and interviews to bolster the interpretation of the data (Neuman 2006:149). As mentioned earlier, while a hermeneutic approach benefits from hearing from participants' viewpoints, avoiding the reification of any single viewpoint by drawing on multiple sources provides greater detail for analysis. By collecting data through multiple different techniques such as participant observation and interviews, this method of studying the poetry slams allows the researcher to approach the subject from multiple vantage points and develop an analysis with more support.

Participant Observation

The first form of data collection, participant observation, allows the researcher to insert himself into the process of the poetry slam to see firsthand how the events unfold and the actions people take. Observation was used to watch the interactions among the performers, judges, the host, and the audience. As a participant observer, the researcher can not only hear what is said but can see, hear, and feel the context of the on-going dialogues with the actions being taken during the events (Neuman 2006:397). Both the routine and the unexpected practices are of interest in the study of the poetry slam to see where resistance manifests in either category of practice. Participant observation allows data to be gathered from seeing how people are interacting and engaging in the practices of the poetry slam. By observing the practices of participants, the researcher can work to evaluate whether those practices were contributing to a carnivalesque atmosphere.

Specific observations were done on how people used the space of the Open Counter during poetry slams and also during its normal business operations as a coffee shop without an event going on. These observations examined the spatial characteristics of practices people

engaged in during each time frame to examine the potential for the creation of a carnivalesque space and time (chronotope). These spatial observations occurred on two occasions at the two-and-a-half hour long poetry slam events and three times during two-hour stints sitting and working at the location during normal business hours. These observations occurred over two months during March and April of 2011. The observation of normal business operations occurred during late morning, the afternoon, and in the evening to get a feel for how busy the coffee shop could be at different times and how people used it. The arrangement of the material environment, the locations and use of furniture, and the movements of individuals within the coffee shop were noted and will be analyzed in chapter four of this thesis. Care was taken to note both routine and unexpected practices going on within the poetry slam event and the normal business of The Open Counter. The data gathered allows the evaluation of carnival through the comparisons to be drawn between the two pertinent chronotopes to highlight both similarities and differences, while noting the intermingling of the practices of both. Through the contrasts, comparisons, and application of theoretical concepts, the spatial expression of resistance can be studied.

Observations were also made at the Rue Vermilion Poetry Slam twice in May of 2011 and on four occasions during August and September of 2011. Different practices and traditions were seen at this slam compared to the Open Counter slam. The observations of both slams will help show common elements that are shared between slams as well as highlight a few of the differences. This study is focused less on contrasting the differences between the slams than looking at how the poetry slam format potentially enables resistant behavior.

Interviews

The next form of data comes from interviews. For this study, the interviews are in-depth and semi-structured with a fair amount of leeway in directing the conversation. In accordance with Bakhtin's emphasis on dialogue, interviews are considered to be a two-way conversation (Neuman 2006:407). The interviewees were encouraged to offer insights outside the boundaries of the initial questions used and to challenge the interviewer if they did not agree with the line of questioning. Having the participants of poetry slams involved in the portrayal of their events through the interviews helps keep the researcher from objectifying the people and their activities. The researcher worked to maintain a dialogic relationship with the subject of study, responding and anticipating challenges that showed up in the interviews. Interviews provide insight into the subjective viewpoints of participants. The interviews in this study attempt to discern whether participants are relating in carnivalesque ways. The interviews also were used as the primary means of finding out if the experiences of poetry slam participants during slam events affected their ordinary everyday lives outside of the poetry slam. This provided insight into whether the poetry slam functions as a carnivalesque critical utopia.

Eleven interview sessions were scheduled with thirteen people, with eight people recruited at the Open Counter Poetry Slam and five recruited at the Rue Vermilion Poetry Slam. The interview process followed procedures that were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Colorado State University. Individual participants were approached either during breaks or after the conclusion of the poetry slams. Individuals were given copies of a recruitment document giving general details about the research project along with information on how to contact the researcher. When possible, interviews were schedule upon first contact; otherwise, participants were contacted by phone or email to arrange a time and place to meet. Of the

interviews recruited at the Open Counter, five interviews took place at the Open Counter during normal business hours when no other event was going on and three interviews were conducted on the local university campus in quiet seating areas in the main student center building. Of the interviewees recruited at the Rue Vermilion, three people were interviewed at Rue Vermilion and one was interviewed at a local coffee shop a few blocks away from the slam location that was still within the downtown metropolitan area. The interviews lasted between forty minutes and an hour-and-fifteen minutes long. The thirteen individuals interviewed were deemed sufficient to highlight common themes and concerns related to poetry slams (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2011:61).

Individuals were recruited for interviews using purposive sampling. Upon attending the event, the researcher approached individuals that could offer a diverse range of experience with the poetry slam. Included in my sample were four female and eight males. Nine of the participants identified as white, two identified as having Hispanic roots, and one participant identified as being from an Asian American ethnic group[2]. Ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 59. There were also four participants who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Each of the interview participants discussed the various roles they had taken on at poetry slams. Two interviewees mainly participated as audience members while the rest of those interviewed had performed at poetry slams. Interviewees were also selected for their participation in other roles such as scorekeeper, judge, and host of the poetry slams. Some were also involved in coaching poetry slam teams both for youth and national competitions. The length of experience with actually attending poetry slams ranged in length from two months to well over 13 years. Each of these individuals offered a rich source of information regarding how the poetry slam is

---

[2] The specific Asian American ethnic group has been left out to maintain the anonymity of the participant.

experienced and interacted with. A detailed analysis of the interviewees' experiences is available in chapter five of this thesis.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is the analytic method used for this research. Thematic analysis is a method, similar to grounded theory, that can be integrated with different theoretical frameworks such as the critical hermeneutic one espoused for this research project (Braun and Clarke 2006:81). Thematic analysis of the texts gathered during research was done in an on-going process alongside the data collection (Braun and Clarke 2006:87). Thematic analysis was done over a series of six phases. First, observation notes, interviews, and audiovisual materials were transcribed, read, and re-read to familiarize the researcher with the data (Braun and Clarke 2006:87). The data then was systematically coded to highlight important and related parts of the text. Next, the initial codes were examined to look for potential themes. The potential themes identified in the previous phase were checked to see how they relate to the initial coding and the entire data set. Subsequently, the ongoing process of analysis resulted in refining, clarifying, and defining the specific details about each theme. The final phase of thematic analysis lay in generating the final report based on the analysis. Thematic analysis as a process was useful for organizing and systematically interpreting the data found in studying the poetry slams.

Three levels of themes are used in thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling 2001:388-389). The first and lowest level of themes is the Basic Theme that draws out basic similarities. Next are Organizing Themes that organize Basic Themes around the similarities of their topics. Finally, Global Themes "are both a summary of the main themes and a revealing interpretation of the texts" (Attride-Stirling 2001:388-389). Considering the different data collection techniques being used, coding for themes at these three levels will allow the researcher to

triangulate themes across the forms of data. Using this structure allows building the analysis from the raw data up into full interpretations of the event being studied.

Thematic analysis will be brought to bear on the texts generated from the observations and interviews. In Chapter Four, the analysis focuses directly on the spatial practices and the environment of the Open Counter during both poetry slams and everyday business. In Chapter Five, the analysis will draw on data from observations of both poetry slams and the information gathered from interviews on the experiences and perspectives shared by participants in the poetry slams. Through applying this method, a better understanding of the role resistance plays in the poetry slam will be shown.

Limitations

No research method is without limitations and all research projects must define the limits to which they can be feasibly extended. This research has a focus on the practice of resistance and the ways people operate. The actions which people undertake are the focus rather than the individual's particular identity. Many studies have been done focusing on how the content of performance poetry represents the identities of poets and communities, but this is not the primary interest of this study. While the themes found in the data may not be universally generalizable because of the sampling method, inferences that can be drawn about resistance and power can offer insights into how people's cultural practices work and affect society. This study limits itself to looking at the carnival form of resistance and its relevance to the poetry slam. Other concepts of resistance may be referenced in connection to the carnival, but must relate back to the main theme of Bakhtin's carnival as a contemporary form of resistance.

A limitation also is in place because of the particular cases chosen for study. The two poetry slams occur in a region where whites make up the vast majority of the population which

did limit the input that could be gathered from participants with different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Many of the participants at the poetry slams I attended were white and appeared to be working or middle class. At other poetry slams around the country and the world, according to the literature, many of the participants come from a more diverse population (Smith and Kraynak 2009:27). The composition of the cases chosen may introduce a bias by over representing the types of people who participate in the events I chose to focus on compared to the national demographics of poetry slam participants. Despite the possibility for this bias, the people interviewed did give a range of opinions that reflect an appreciation for diverse cultural influences.

Spatial-temporal boundaries exist as well for this research. The venue and the times designated for the poetry slam events will be the focus. Any activities outside of the events will not be part of the observation data collection. The poets and organizers of poetry slams do a lot of work outside of the poetry slam, writing and practicing poetry, promoting the events, and organizing corollary activities like National Poetry Slam tryouts. The actual poetry slam event is the focus for these activities where the practices achieve their culmination in performance. While it would be great to have a study finding out all the different activities involved in the art world of the production of poetry slams, this remains for other studies to pursue (Becker 1982). Some information regarding activities outside of the poetry slam events may be gathered during interviews, but will be limited in its focus to the effects of participation in poetry slams and its carnivalesque potential. Also related to the temporal scope of the study, research will be done through observing several iterations of the two cases selected; however, a longitudinal observational study will not be performed because of time constraints in which the actual research must be accomplished. A more expansive cross-sectional study also is not currently

feasible due to the limit of the number of poetry slams geographically accessible by the researcher at the current time.

Moving Forward

The investigation of carnival resistance has now been setup both theoretically and methodologically. With the data that has been gathered and analyzed, the next step of a hermeneutic approach has come: namely, interpretation. In the next two chapters the analysis of poetry slams will be laid out as it has taken shape out of the information gathered. Chapter Four focuses on how people use the space of the poetry slam and its relation to carnival. Chapter Five draws on the interviews and observations of the poetry slam to judge whether carnival resistance is evident in the experiences at the poetry slam and how those experiences may or may not show an effect outside of the event.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW SPACE GETS SLAMMED:

CARNIVAL AND CHRONOTOPES

"Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their

intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together. In that

respect, pedestrian movements form one of these 'real systems whose existence in

fact makes up the city.' They are not localized; it is rather they that spatialize."

(De Certeau 1984:97)

What sets apart a coffee break and a spoken word performance? Sometimes, just a little

bit of time and a few rearrangements of furniture can demonstrate how the two can exist side by

side with people using the same space in different ways. Often when studying part of a culture,

the social interactions and verbal communications acquire the primary focus while the physical

and material environment that constitutes the site of the cultural practices is relegated to the

background. However, the materiality of place can provide a solid foundation for examining the

social and rhetorical organization of cultural activity. In the social sciences, the study of space

and time in relation to social activities and their organization has continued to intrigue

researchers. With poetry slams, people communicate not only through their spoken

performances, but also through their movement and use of the space.

In transitioning between the ordinary business hours of a coffee shop and the poetry slam,

the spatial rhetoric changes to fit the different uses to which the space is put. The ways in which

the spatial rhetoric changes—and does not change—will contribute to the overall purpose of

evaluating whether poetry slams show carnivalesque characteristics. For the sake of this chapter, the focus lies on evaluating the resistant spatial practices that distinguish the everyday coffee shop and the poetry slam. By distinguishing spatial characteristics, the creation of a carnival space in the poetry slam outside of the everyday existence of the coffee shop will be examined.

In searching for what elements of the carnival can be discerned in the context surrounding the poetry slam, space provides a fundamental element that must be addressed. Bakhtin showed that the carnival entailed activities organizing time and space in a different manner from everyday life (Morson and Emerson 1990:435). Chronotope is a concept that refers to a social construction of a particular space and time that organizes cultural activities (Allor 2006:46). Having a separate chronotope (time-space) in which carnival occurs facilitates the renewing capability of the carnival and creates an awareness of new possibilities (Bakhtin 1968:246). To ascertain if the chronotope of the poetry slam has been carnivalized, the slam must be differentiated from the spatial organization of the everyday operations of the coffee shop. How the coffee shop's ordinary operations and the poetry slam articulate chronotopes will be evaluated through looking at a few different factors.   The ways people move through the space, find seats, and how they orient themselves to sights and sounds in the space all contribute to show how differences in the cultural organization of space are constructed.

One poetry slam located at the Open Counter coffee shop will be used to examine the spatial characteristics of carnivalesque resistance. The Open Counter coffee shop resides in the downtown area of College Town right along the main street through the city. The ordinary operations of the coffee shop and the poetry slam which occur within the same downtown location will both be analyzed as chronotopes that organize the practices of people within those contexts. For poetry slams, enthusiasts recognize that "the shape of the room will shape the

audience, the mood of the room will give its ambiance" (Glazner 2000:15). If the mood reflected by the spatial rhetoric sets the poetry slam off as a separate chronotope showing carnivalesque characteristics, then the spatial underpinnings of carnival as a contemporary form of resistance will have been established.

Space, Time, and Practice

Chronotope: Cultural Space-Time

The term chronotope translates literally into "time-space" and derives from Einstein's theorization about space and time being directly connected (Bakhtin 1981:84). Bakhtin appropriated the discovery of the interconnection of temporal and spatial relationships for application within the humanities and social sciences. Bakhtin (1981:252) wrote, "Every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope." Meaning cannot be made distinct from the material spaces because "culture is not made of dead elements, for even a simple brick as we have already said, in the hands of a builder expresses something through its form" (Bakhtin 1986:6). Subsequent scholars have discussed the chronotope as "a special kind of space-time" (Ladin 1999:231). The chronotope is partially a "historical and cultural construction" which works to define the actions and events possible within that spatial-temporal context. Chronotope as an analytical concept designates a historical framework of practices and the cultural organization of practices associated with particular places. Action and thought are situated in particular space-time conjunctions that bring together strands of history and the opportunities afforded by the semantically rich material world that people live in. The chronotope organizes practices.

Different areas of everyday life have their own relationships to time and space. For many scholars, space and time are associated simply with the empirical measurements that can be

made with inches and seconds dividing and separating one object from the other, one moment from the next. In the social sciences, space and time can be viewed as meaningful parts of the fabric of society. Scholars have pointed out the social and rhetorical qualities of space and how people meaningfully interact with spaces. Stewart and Dickinson (2008:283) argue for understanding place making gestures as "always rhetorical." Michel de Certeau (1984) described how people consuming space illustrates cultural meaning. These social activities and events rely on various "rhythms and social organizations [such as those] of the assembly line, agricultural labor, sexual intercourse and parlor conversation' (Morson and Emerson 1990:368).

The meanings and practices associated with these different areas of life can be seen as part of constructing particular chronotopes. By using the chronotope, cultural practices become spatialized and historicized as fitting for their specific space-time. Place has been defined as being "constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus" which dovetails well with the chronotope concept of a cultural construct for space-time (Allor 2006:43). For example, a baseball field can be viewed as a chronotope. The chronotope of the baseball field encompasses not only the physical and built environment but also organizes the practices of what people do on that field. The practices of the players on the field help to designate what the appropriate actions are in that space. The actions taken in this space articulate the rhetorical and cultural significance of the baseball field as a socially constructed arena. During the baseball game, those playing a game on the field will adhere to historical and cultural patterns of how the game should be played.

Chronotopes do not simply exist in discrete isolation (Bakhtin 1981:252). Chronotopes are "mutually inclusive, they coexist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships"

35

(Bakhtin 1981:252). They overlap and impinge on one another. Larger chronotopes can be broken down into lesser chronotopes (Ladin 1999:215).

Larger, expansive chronotopes can exist at a level above others, describing epochs and eras within which the more nuanced and refined lesser chronotopes can exist. For example, one could discuss the era of globalization as a higher-level chronotope within which reside lesser chronotopes such as in works that look at how McDonalds and KFC localized to cultures outside the US (Watson and Caldwell 2005). Stewart and Dickinson (2008) similarly highlight how a mall in Colorado draws on globalized images while seeking to enunciate locality by also using images related to the aesthetic of Colorado ski town architecture and local geographic formations. Chronotopes can also exist side by side. An example of coexisting chronotopes resides within the coffee shop, where a smaller chronotope is in place at the counter involving the act of creating and purchasing beverages while just a few feet away another chronotope exists at tables where the coffee is consumed and private conversations can occur with friends. The chronotopes given in these examples can be distinguished as separate from one another; yet, each chronotope exists in relation to the others and can interact with them as well.

The studies mentioned above show how chronotopes can be layered within one another such as the mall's drawing on cultural symbols tied to surrounding geography. The overlapping and interpenetrating nature of chronotopes and their organization of social life should be taken into account when tying together space and practices. The ordinary operations of the coffee shop and the poetry slam can be seen as constituting chronotopes that produce and are reproduced by the disparate activities of the people in those contexts. The coffee shop functions as a place of business and sociability, where people come together for drinks and socializing. The same place hosts the poetry slam involving competitive performance of regular poets from the surrounding

community attracting the attention of the audience and packing the shop with bodies. How do these two sets of practices come to illustrate different chronotopes within the same place? Having emphasized up to this point how the social construction of space-time in the form of the chronotope organizes practices, the discussion now will turn to how the connection between practices and spaces forms.

Connecting Chronotopes and Practices: Spatial Dialogue

A dialogical relationship exists between practices and chronotopes. Most scholars applying Bakhtin focus, as he did, on the dialogue of written and spoken language. In this study instead of verbal dialogue, spatial dialogue becomes the focus. The spatial practices of individuals work to articulate a nonverbal dialogue describing the social dimensions of a space (Simonsen 2005:6). De Certeau (1984) believed that movement worked to enunciate social and cultural meaning by how people used and navigated space. Enunciation requires the practitioner to draw on an existing communicative system, appropriate the language it uses, inscribe a relationship between two communicators, and establish a "present" time in which the enunciation occurs (de Certeau 1984:33).

In the context of space, scholars such as de Certeau, Morris, Stewart, and Dickinson have shown how spatial practices enunciate the character of the space. De Certeau wrote that practices have their own logic. Practices such as walking spell out a spatial rhetoric that communicates social and cultural meanings. For de Certeau, "a movement always seems to condition the production of a space and to associate it with a history" (de Certeau 1984:118). The practices of people within a space not only produce and reproduce the cultural construction of proper behavior within a space, people act as consumers of a space that can come up with creative uses for the built environment and the objects within them (de Certeau 1984: xiv).

37

Combining the concept of enunciation with chronotopes creates a spatial dialogue among the sets of practices tied with the different chronotopes. The dialogue occurs among the individual currently using the space, the people around them, and those who in the past arranged the physical landscape of the space. For Stewart and Dickinson, the Flatirons mall in its construction enunciated a Colorado locality within a globalized context (2008:282). Morris draws on de Certeau to demonstrate how walking in the city enunciates characteristics of the urban space (2004:688). The practices of shopping in a mall or walking down a city block demonstrate a spatial dialogue between the existing meanings attached to these places and how the individual uses that space in their movements and activities.

Carnivalesque Spatial Practices

In the spatial context so far the concepts of spatial dialogue, chronotopes, and enunciative practices have been brought up. As outlined in Chapter 2, carnival rests on a foundation of dialogue and resistant practices. How can these spatial concepts illuminate aspects of the carnival? Carnival involves the creation of a space outside of normal everyday routines. In the carnival chronotope, language and actions should work to invert the social order and allow a free, familiar mode of interaction to pervade. Spatial practices of the carnival should demonstrate these characteristics the same as verbal practices would. How does the carnival chronotope set itself apart from everyday life? What spatial practices can be deemed as resistant in a carnivalesque manner? The concepts of appropriation and tactics can be used in conjunction with carnival to examine resistance.

When considering spatial practices, theorists emphasize both the possibilities for proper uses of the space and improper, innovative uses for the space. In Vivoni's study of skateboarders, he showed that spaces like malls, parking lots, and public sidewalks could

undergo spatial appropriation (Vivoni 2009:136). Despite their intended purpose, places like these can have alternate practices performed to turn them into a skateboarding spot. Lefebvre also was interested in the ways that people can appropriate or re-appropriate spaces to use in alternate ways, and in so doing generate an alternate social space such as carnival (Simonsen 2005:6). The "right to the city" which Lefebvre advocated insisted that inhabitants of cities have the opportunity to re-appropriate and organize their urban spaces according to their needs as opposed to those imposed by national regulations (Purcell 2002:106). Appropriation allows the creation of a new organizing principle for the place, a new chronotope through which practices can be meaningfully enacted.

De Certeau used the dual concepts of strategies and tactics to describe the difference between proper and appropriated usage of space (1984:25-37). Strategies derive from existing relationships of power and are used to designate what is proper and delineate means of control over a place. On the other hand, the tactic is a way of operating for the weak. Tactics take advantage of the opportunities that open up in the moment, allowing the less powerful to make new, varied, and creative uses out of objects, places, and people. With tactics, strategies, propriety, and appropriation, the uses for which spaces are intended intermingle with the uses for which they have been appropriated. These concepts can be gainfully applied to determine whether a separation between the everyday and the carnival is occurring, creating an opening for resistance to take place.

Observing Context

Within the Open Counter coffee shop, two possible chronotopes will be examined, one being the everyday ordinary operations of a coffee shop and the other being the poetry slam which occurs there once a month. Through observing each context on a few occasions, the

practices exhibited by people will be used to see if there are visible differences in how the space of the coffee shop is used differently. If there are significant differences, then the two contexts constitute distinguishable chronotopes. Proper, strategic behaviors and actions should exist within the ordinary operations of The Open Counter, while other tactically resistant practices should be demonstrated during the poetry slam. Once it is established that these two contexts are different chronotopes, the form of resistance within the spatial practices can be examined. Does the ordinary business of the coffee shop show itself to be purpose built to serve its function as a business and a place for sociability? Do the people attending in the poetry slam, on the other hand, appropriate the space of the coffee shop in a resistant manner? The extent to which the poetry slam shows characteristics of a carnival chronotope will help show how useful the carnival concept can be in a spatial context. Also, what are the limits to distinguishing the ordinary business operations from the practices of the poetry slam? The spatial practices and uses of the space may enunciate a mixing and intermingling of the two chronotopes. By addressing these different concerns, a richer understanding of carnival and chronotopes can emerge.

Analysis

The Shape of the Room

The site chosen for analysis has a number of fixed qualities to the space and other aspects that are more dynamic which show changes between the different observations periods. The walls, stairs, counters, registers, bookshelves, and displays remain largely the same from one time to the next. Other elements such as the furniture move through the space according to the needs of the people using them. Tables, chairs, and couches all move about, being rearranged according to the needs of the coffee shop occupants. The fixity or the mobility of the different

40

material features of the coffee shop offer a structuring function to the spatial practices of inhabitants while also still offering plenty of opportunities for different uses to be implemented. Before diving into a discussion of how specific practices enunciate a space, a general description will be made of the most relevant features of the coffee shop.

The Open Counter's storefront is made up of a large glass window with the store's emblem imprinted upon it. The store has a long narrow design with a narrower entrance area opening into a slightly wider middle area. Each of these areas has furniture with two sectional couches, 10 small tables, stools, a piano and coffee tables. The service counter is located in the middle third of the space on the left hand side where the cash register, espresso machines, coffee machines and other gadgets of the coffee trade are located. This is the arena of the baristas. The service and preparation areas and all the equipment for mixing, grinding, steaming, and selling beverages are located on two parallel counters, one against the wall and the other further out upon which lies an espresso machine, the register, and the baked goods.

Towards the back, the service counter ends with an open space between its end and a dividing wall that separates the washing area along the left wall and the counter for the Aura Bookstore. The Aura Bookstore occupies the back portion of the establishment. The Aura Bookstore is a nonprofit bookstore that sells books—both used and new—, t-shirts, and bumper stickers. The back area has two levels. The store has a high ceiling throughout the front yet back by the Aura Bookstore counter, a set of stairs goes up to a second floor balcony which has an open view to the rest of the store and contains tables and chairs. Both on the walls of the second-level balcony area and underneath on the ground floor are bookshelves filled with books along the edges of the walls.

Additional elements beyond the furniture and layout contribute to the space as well. Pezzullo (2007:29) acknowledges the need to incorporate all of the senses in understanding people's embodied experience of a place. People experience the world as "a smell, a sound, a touch, a taste, or a sensation" (Pezzullo 2007:29). In The Open Counter, there are sights, smells, tastes and sounds that contribute to the sensual experience. The taste and smells created by the brewing of coffee remain the same during each of the chronotopes. Beverages and edibles are both prepared and served in the same fashion during the poetry slam as during regular, everyday activities providing a certain amount of continuity. With sight and sound, however, the experience changes depending on how the space is used in each chronotope. The differences and similarities in sensual experience can contribute to the analysis of the spatial practices.

This description should give an idea of the general layout of the place with one area for seating towards the front, another in the middle, and another up on the balcony. Each has fixed characteristics like shelves, counters, benches, stairs that remain fixed while also containing movable objects like couches, chairs, tables, and stools. Next, the analysis will turn to the ways these material features affect and are affected by the practices of individuals who use this space.

Consuming the Space of the Coffee Shop

The movements of individuals within The Open Counter during normal business hours enunciate the space as meaningful, creating a spatial dialogue. These movements draw on the symbolic and material resources of the space represented by the objects and material characteristics of the space to create a performance of what use this space has for these individuals (Stewart and Dickinson 2008:287). At the same time, the material environment serves to structure and constrain the actions taken by those moving about within the space. In

42

the case of The Open Counter, the space and the movements contribute to a spatial dialogue enunciating the chronotope of ordinary operations.

The chronotope of ordinary operations is situated within the history of coffee shops and the cultural practices that have grown up surrounding them. Cultural practices such as the grinding, brewing, and drinking of coffee have been highlighted as important factors by Dickinson in his study of Starbucks (2002:12). Further, the ordering of drinks at Starbucks was highlighted by Dickinson as a ritualized activity that ties the customer into a space of rejuvenation momentarily outside of the hectic pace of everyday life (2002:19). The Open Counter, as a coffee shop, functions within this existing cultural framework that has developed over time. As such, proper cultural practices surrounding this space have been designated through repetition and reiteration. These same activities and others were observed in the chronotope of the ordinary operations at The Open Counter as well.

In the chronotope of ordinary operations, individuals take on two major roles that structure their participation in the spatial dialogue. The baristas work behind the counter to take orders, grind, pour, mix, steam, and serve the beverages resulting from these processes to the customers. The baristas operate behind the service counter, moving back and forth between cupboards, fridges, machines, and the register. Their movements enunciate their role as the barista who controls the area behind the counter, fixing beverages and serving the displayed baked goods for consumption. On occasion they leave the confines of the service counter area to collect empty mugs, plates, and silverware from the bussing bin. The customer constitutes the second major role in this scenario. Customers enter through the front door and move through the coffee shop, purchasing drinks and food, and finding places to situate themselves.

The Open Counter as mentioned above has three areas to sit in with multiple types of seats spread throughout these areas. When engaging in seating practices, a number of different opportunities are available. Many people arrange to meet with each other at the coffee shop. Some choose to sit at the tables in the middle seating area on chairs around a table, while other sit side by side on couches, speaking and turning slightly to talk with one another. Quite a few customers will grab a drink, pull out a laptop at a table and just ignore everyone else. Some who come have brought work and huddle around a laptop upstairs in the balcony area, away from the gradual in and out flows of people through the other two seating areas. If de Certeau's theory of strategies and tactics is applied to the practice of seating oneself then in the ordinary operations chronotope, people behave strategically (1984:36). The choice of seating by customers fits the proper type of seating for whichever particular practice they participate in. Plus, on a very basic level, placing oneself in a chair, stool, or a couch follows along with everyday norms of seating. The strategy lies in choosing to follow normal practices of society in deciding what suitable, proper seating is.

Alongside what uses and movements people make of a space, the factors that help organize activity within the space deserve examination for their contribution to the spatial dialogue. The various senses that individuals bring to bear help define a chronotope through the senses relation to the activities undertaken. Within the ordinary operations, the organization of the senses of sight and hearing will be examined.

Sight has been described as "a valuable sense to assess who we have been, are, and want to be" (Pezzullo 2007:28). How images are seen reflects the subjective experiences of the individual viewing them and the context in which they are seen (Sturken and Cartwright

2001:46). Visual practices and experiences help organize and orient the ways people interact with a space.

The individual sitting in the coffee shop during ordinary operations has many options for where to focus his vision but no single, particular visual focus exists for the space. Goffman (1959:107) wrote that in an everyday setting such as cocktail parties, there are many different performances going on in "separate knots or clusters of verbal interaction." This allows for multiple foci for the people going about their separate purposes in the specified setting. When ordering, the menu boards above the service counter draw attention, but once a drink is ordered the customer will likewise move their attention. When looking for a seat, couches, chairs, and stools draw the vision, yet after sitting down the eyes can wander elsewhere. When seated, the individual can be looking for a friend to come through the door, be gazing at the artwork on the wall , have their eyes glued to a book or a laptop computer screen, or they could be conversing with another person across the table.

The sense of hearing provides another important component for organizing a space. DeNora (2000:151) writes in particular about the organizational properties of music. Through a study of the sounds of shopping, DeNora looked at how background music shapes the experience of the retail setting (2000:147). The sounds within the retail stores provided another sense through which the consumer forms an impression of the setting and their role in that place (DeNora 2000:143). The sense of hearing and the sounds in the environment thus shape the interaction of people within the space. The sounds of a space "serve as an index for a whole style or gestalt of in-store conduct" (DeNora 2000:141). A change in sound alters how people interact. With the transition from ordinary operations to the poetry slam, a distinct change in the soundscape occurs that needs to be accounted for.

The sounds of The Open Counter resemble those typical of most coffee shops. Whirring, hissing, grinding sounds from the store's machinery accompany the normal practices of the baristas. The clattering of silverware and dishes can be heard as they are washed. A general murmur hovers in the room from conversations. Music wafts from small speakers hidden in corners around the room. During ordinary operations, these types of sounds compose the soundscape of The Open Counter. None of the sounds rises to dominate for long, instead blending into the background. Within this sonic experience, again one can see the segmented experience of the coffee shop. Some customers choose to focus on their partner's voice in a conversation, while other customers put on headphones. Within the coffee shop, people construct their own private, personalized spheres of interaction in which to focus their senses. As with sight, sound offers no central organizing focus for customers, giving room for people's attention to drift between the different noises.

The different choices people make in using the space and orienting themselves in the space articulates the public nature of the coffee shop while simultaneously creating gaps between the different groups formed. As with the cocktail parties in Goffman's example where social performances create separate knots of communicative behavior, so also do the visual experiences and practices in the ordinary operations of the Open Counter create separate spheres of visual interaction based on the more private, individually oriented needs of customers (1959:107). De Certeau stated that "a space treated in this way and shaped by practices is transformed into enlarged singularities and separate islands" (1984:101). The movements and clustering of seats enunciates the gaps and intersections between people navigating the social space of the coffee shop. Through their enunciative actions, customers of the coffee shop engage in a spatial dialogue with the baristas, each other, and the material space they occupy.

Consuming the Space of the Poetry Slam

The poetry slam occurs in the same physical, material place as the ordinary operations of the Open Counter. The chronotope of the poetry slam should be seen not as completely replacing but existing alongside (and intertwined with) the chronotope of ordinary operations. During the poetry slam, customers who enter the store undertake many of the same actions of ordering drinks and buying scones and coffee cake while the baristas still engage in the complex practices of making cappuccinos, smoothies, and teas. However, despite the persistence of these familiar practices from ordinary operations, the practices of the poetry slam transform how people interact with the space and each other. The poets and audience members appropriate the space in numerous ways to fit the needs of the poetry slam. A new spatial dialogue emerges with the chronotope of the poetry slam that occurs alongside the continued ordinary operations of the shop, maintaining some of the same practices while allowing the development of new resistant possibilities as well

The movements inside the chronotope of the poetry slam share similarities to those evident in the ordinary operations of the Open Counter. Individuals' movements reflect a "process of multiple bodily inscriptions" where the texts that they compose articulate different meanings (Morris 2004:687). Schechner (2003:174) explains that for a theatrical space to be created out of a place, people must write on that space through their actions and words. Individuals as they enter the Open Counter during the poetry slam have to take action and move through the space: hearing, seeing and enacting the chronotope of the poetry slam.

Some people choose to stand near the entrance, waiting for poetry performances to end before they move further into the shop. Some leave, not wishing to be lost in the press of bodies, deciding instead to head for other places. Many who enter look around for familiar faces to find

a place to sit alongside. The interest in finding seating is apparent in the movements that people make towards possible areas of open seating. Quite a few of those who enter also choose to enter into a line, engaging in the venerable art of queuing to wait their turn to purchase a beverage and food.

A constraining factor that emerges during the poetry slam that was not present during ordinary operations is the sheer number of people trying to crowd into the space. During ordinary operations, surges of activity and periods of increased business can bring a few more bodies to occupy seats, yet people cycle through often leaving enough seating to go around. However, the amount of people coming during a poetry slam at The Open Counter outnumbers the available seats. Starting an hour before the slam begins, the crowd filters in. Chairs, couches, and stools acquire sitters before the event begins and still more people arrive. The low bench platform along the wall of the middle seating area is sat upon as well as the counter in the back right just past that. People sit on the stairs. In the front area, during multiple observations, groups of people began sitting on coffee tables and the floor surrounding them since the couches nearby were full. Still more folks stand just inside the front window, next to the service counter, or back besides the stairs among the bookshelves.

It is here, confronting the actions of poetry slam participants where one can discern differences between the two chronotopes of the Open Counter's ordinary operations and the poetry slam. While the coffee shop, during regular operations, will occasionally see a person sit on a coffee table talking to another on the couch next to it, the majority of those in the space at any one time will adhere to everyday proper seating practices. The poetry slam chronotope, however, enables a crowd to collectively disregard these practices in the pursuit of accommodating a large enough numbers of people to create an audience to which poets can

perform. With the increased density of people in the shop, seating becomes a more significant concern for those entering. They are forced to find a place wherever they can sit or stand. People are mixed together, needing to ask if seats are open, squeezing between other people, and settling down next to strangers on couches. While other types of events might try to find a venue with enough seating to fully accommodate the audience, this poetry slam continues to maintain its ties to the Open Counter where it has been located for seven years.

While they may not speak together freely among the strangers with which they are situated, the audience members do overcome some personal boundary issues and fill in the available areas for seating. Bakhtin (1968:10) wrote that in carnival there was "no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times". While the audience continued to be polite and limit conversation with strangers in the audience, the spatial dialogue of their seating practices showed at least some breakdown of boundaries within the event. The density of the audience provides just one factor that, in conjunction with a general atmosphere of creative sharing, created a situation where the boundaries could be lowered.

Another factor is that many of the audience members desire to remain for the whole duration of the poetry slam, which lasts for about two and a half hours. Contrast this to customers who will meet friends for half an hour or an hour during the coffee shop's normal activity to chat while most customers stay just long enough to grab a drink and leave soon after. In thinking about these factors, different principles can be seen at work that organize and construct people's practices in different ways for the two chronotopes. During poetry slams, not all of the audience members desire to stay the whole time. Some choose to come and go in a short time, buying a coffee and leaving having just been curious about what was going on.

These spectators skirt along the edges of the poetry slam chronotope while interacting with the ordinary operations of the coffee shop.

When compared to the seating practices of the ordinary operations of the coffee shop, those of the poetry slam comprise tactical appropriations. Poetry slam participants appropriate seating by using objects that are built for certain purposes and turning them to others. This appropriation articulates a basic form of profanation by allowing an object that should be manipulated in a certain manner instead being manipulated in an inappropriate manner (Bouissac 1990:196). For example, a counter is generally understood as a place to set a cup of coffee, a laptop, journal, or other objects. To turn this counter into a place of seating changes the meaning associated with this fixture. Describing this as profanation indicates how this action exposes the principles of everyday seating and the designations of what proper seating should be (Bouissac 1990:197). Bakhtin (1968:16) sees profanation as being an important element of creating a carnivalesque atmosphere. As with Vivoni's (2009) study of skaters, the intended purpose of a space does not disallow alternate usage. Instead, a person simply has to become aware of different possibilities for consuming the space that de Certeau spoke of in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984:30). Additionally, the tactical use of a public space that encourages alternate uses aligns well with the carnival's purpose for showing new possibilities.

Working alongside the seating practices and movements shown during the two chronotopes, people's sensual experiences also serve to highlight a divergence in the organizing principles for the space. The senses of sight and hearing organize the activities of the poetry slam chronotope along different lines than during the ordinary operations chronotope. The poetry slam chronotope alters the experience of the space by providing a single focal point: the stage. Goffman wrote that "often a performance will involve only one focus of visual attention on the

part of the performer and audience" such as during political speeches or in the interaction

between a doctor and his patient (Goffman 1959:106). This principle can be seen in the visual

focus created in the poetry slam by having a part of the venue designated as a "stage". The

poetry slam stage, rather than being designated by a raised platform or some other structural

element, finds definition through the moving of objects away from an area. Tables and chairs are

pushed back from a corner in the middle part of the room where it widens out. The tables and

chairs right next to the stage are rearranged so that the chairs are away from the stage, but

oriented towards it. The stage is another example of how space has been appropriated for a new

purpose. Additional elements highlight the stage, such as two speakers, a stereo, and a

microphone stand that are set up around it to boost the sound of the performers. These objects

indicate the location of the stage and the use of them reinforces the visual focus on this area.

During the poetry slam competition, people's visual focus fixes on whoever takes the

stage and takes hold of the microphone. The stage and the person who occupies it becomes the

main visual focal point of the room. The visual focus takes on material form through the

embodied practice of the audience orienting their seated bodies, eyes, and ears towards the stage.

Within the space of the Open Counter, the position of the stage has significant ties with the built

environment. The Open Counter was purpose built to provide a space for the practices evident in

the ordinary operations of a coffee shop. Those practices as discussed above result in the

creation of different knots and groupings of the individuals within that space without a specific

visual focus. Instead, with the poetry slam, the visual practices of the audience and performers

show the collective coming together of people within the space.

With the designation of the stage and the need for people to orient them towards the place

of performance, the tactical, appropriative nature of the poetry slam is enunciated in the visual

experience. People who sit within the middle seating area have a direct line of sight and can keep their eyes on the stage. Audience members positioned in the front seating area, however, have difficulties maintaining a visual link with the performer. The stage is oriented towards the back of the shop. Although some of the performers turn to the side and look that way on occasion, many of the poets do not. Additionally, the front area of the store also becomes a place where people who entered the venue after the performances began find places to stand, watch, and listen. Some people who try to find tactical seating, such as on coffee tables or the floor, check to see if they were blocking the vision of already seated audience members. On the other hand, some of the latecomers place themselves so other audience members would lose sight of the performers at the microphone. Between performances, a few standers would move about and try to find better positions to place themselves.

The jockeying for positions and the desire to see the stage highlights the organizational role of the visual senses in the chronotope of the poetry slam. Unlike the ordinary operations of the Open Counter, the people within the poetry slam demonstrate a collective coming together. The visual connects the audience together. Instead of separate clusters of private activities in a public space, people join together in attending to the poetry slam competition. The collective acts of the crowd—in part through visual practices and experiences—produce and reproduce the social space of the poetry slam (Morris 2004:689). Within the poetry slam, the spatial practices of the people have the effect of creating "the knowledge of a shared purpose and participation; and of a meaning that transforms the materiality of space itself" (Crouch 1998:167, as quoted in Morris 2004:689).   Kohn and Cain (2005:365) demonstrated that solitary individuals within an audience could demonstrate a collective, communal character in their performative engagement. Although audience members continue to act as solitary selves, they also exhibit a connection to

52

each other and the performers. The visual practices of the audience in part are responsible for bringing the audience into position to appreciate the poetry slam as its own meaningful context. The collective participation in the poetry slam fulfills the need for everyone to participate which Bakhtin outlined for carnival. Instead of being wrapped up primarily in private affairs, the audience is connected through the performance.

A poetry slam, by definition, also relies upon sound to organize the event. Spoken word poetry performances provide the raison d'être of the poetry slam. Poetry slams showcase the oral performance of poetry written by ordinary people from all walks of life. The chronotope of the poetry slam relies on sound as a primary pillar about which to organize the experiences and practices of the event. As with the visual, the stage becomes the focal point from which the sound of the poetry performance is carried. Not only do eyes turn towards this area, but ears as well, waiting to capture the words of performers and the host.   Before and after each performance, a general hubbub emerges from the crowd; however, the audience quiets during performances to allow the sounds of the poetry to penetrate further into the store. The audience claps for the performers giving sonorous approbation for their efforts. Sound is essential to both receive the message of the poem and to respond to it.   On occasions when the performers do not speak up, individuals in the audience will shout out that they cannot hear. Also when the performer is not loud enough, the host will get up and help them reset the microphone so that the performer can speak more clearly and fully into the microphone. Some performers observed also forsook the microphone for parts of their poems. Instead they spoke more loudly for the audience to hear without the aid of the speakers.

Carnival Spatial Practices

How do the various practices that have been covered demonstrate carnival? Of the numerous practices that have now been analyzed, a divide has been shown between the way people act during the ordinary operations of the coffee shop and how they act during a poetry slam. The poetry slam participants' observed practices enunciate a separate chronotope from the usual business of a coffee shop, opening the space up to appropriation by the performers and audience that comprise the poetry slam. This conforms to the carnival's need for separation from everyday life. Further areas where the poetry slam shows carnivalesque elements will be summarized here.

Participation by all involved is one of the cornerstones of the carnival that can be seen in the given examples. This is illustrated through the sensual reorientation that occurs within the space, with occupants' vision and hearing redirecting to the stage. The sensual orientation within the slam creates an atmosphere where people collectively participate through clapping and cheering. The slam takes over the space that formerly had people sitting with their laptops doing work and idly talking with friends at their table. The focus of people's hearing and seeing changes from these individualized activities like work or personal conversations at a coffee shop to the collective participation of the poetry slam audience.

Examples have been given showing how appropriation occurs in the poetry slam. With the spatial turn used for this analysis, appropriation and tactical activities provide the means by which carnival is enacted. The creation of a stage shows an innovative use of an area that had tables and chairs pushed back to empty out an area. Appropriation of seating also demonstrates tactical use of the objects available thus showing new possibilities besides the rote established understanding of what countertops, coffee tables, and stairs generally are used for.

Demonstrating alternate possibilities dovetails with Gardiner's view of carnival as a critical utopia where people can become aware of different possibilities other than the established, everyday interpretations (Gardiner 1992:32). While choosing to use stairs as a seat at a poetry slam is not the most profound act, the amalgamation of the little acts of appropriation lend themselves to the general atmosphere of the poetry slam. By seeing new possibilities in little actions, the poetry slam becomes carnivalized.

Limits and Intermingling of Chronotopes

Limits exist for distinguishing the boundaries of the two chronotopes that have been the focus in this chapter. From how the people orient themselves to the sights and sounds to the actions they take in seating themselves, an intermingling of the chronotopes can be seen during the poetry slam. Since ordinary operations are still occurring, the sounds of the baristas making beverages, setting plates, and cleaning dishes continue to create quite a bit of noise during poetry slams. The shop operates as a business and although it takes on an additional purpose as a poetry slam venue, the chronotopes of the two do interact. Bakhtin did say that chronotopes intermingle and affect each other (1981:252). The noises of the baristas cut occasionally into the sounds of the performances. While during regular business hours, the baristas' noisy activities serve mainly to create a background buzz, during a performance they turn into noticeably jarring distractions from the poetry which has become the dominant sound element of the space. The poetry slam, although occupying the physical place of The Open Counter at that time, cannot completely push out the practices of the ordinary operations of the coffee shop. The poetry slam is effectively embedded within the ordinary operations of The Open Counter. The chronotope of ordinary operations dictates that business—alongside the show—must go on. While there are

distinguishable aspects of the two chronotopes, these factors point to the overlap of the everyday and the carnival.

The built environment of The Open Counter provides certain limits to the tactical appropriation of the place with regards to sound and sight. The speakers and sound system connected with the microphone face from the stage towards the back of the shop. Audience members in the front seating area have neither a poet's voice or the amplified sound of the stereo speakers pointed in their direction, instead hearing the poet through the reflection of the sound. The sound is generally still discernible, but does not provide an optimal auditory experience. For those sitting in the balcony, the poet's use of the microphone can cause concerns for hearing as well. Many performers have little experience using a microphone and are unaware of the need to keep their mouth in close proximity. If the poet stays back or moves their head side to side, the microphone will not catch all of the sound and the audience will be left in the dark as to what has been spoken. Considering the poetry slam is a competition and that judges for the event can be sitting in the balcony, the need to have sound work further back is an issue. Carnivalesque appropriation can run into limits imposed by the physical features of the room whether that affects sound or sight.

The same issues that disrupt the sound also affect the visual element of seeing performances. Those sitting at the front of the coffee shop get a view of the back side of the performer because of the stage being oriented towards the back of the shop. This reduces the capacity of the audience to see some of the expressions and gestures that accompany the verbal performance. Additionally, those seated in the balcony are far away because of the length of the room. When judges situated in this area have to present their scores, the scorekeepers have difficulty seeing the score written on the judges' little whiteboards. This can disrupt the flow of

the scoring and lead to miscommunication. The uncertainty may contribute to the carefree nature of carnival, but could also indicate a disruption of the participatory nature of the slam.

As far as the movements through the space and seating, some limits do exist as well. The poetry slam brings a lot of people in who want to stay for a while and this uses up a lot of space. For the most part the employees of the Open Counter do not mind how people seat themselves, with a few exceptions. The baristas were observed asking a woman to not move a stool into the aisleway that passes in front of the service counter and allows movement from the front of the store to the back. Access had to be maintained for people availing themselves of the services of the ordinary operations and for the rest of the slam audience to move back and forth. Plus businesses are held to a fire code that governs the need to have aisle ways and access to exits that may have been a factor as well. So while people had the opportunity to see new possibilities for using the space in different ways, the chronotope of ordinary operations still maintained certain limits over the walkway.

These examples demonstrate that the appropriation and realization of alternate possibilities for a space can face limitations due to the materiality of that space. Although the intended purpose of material objects does not always reflect the possible uses, the intended purpose still shapes the place and the objects within it in ways that can constrain and structure practices and experiences. So while tactical spatial dialogue can show new uses of a space, the everyday strategic uses mix together with the carnivalesque. The intended purpose of the space and the actions associated with each chronotope are interconnected, both enabling and constraining each other.

Conclusion

Spaces never exist in isolation from the people and practices occurring within them. They produce and reproduce as part of a social construction process weaving space, time, and culture into the complex fabric of society. At the same time, different chronotopes coexist, intermingle, and interconnect with one another. This study has sought to demonstrate where there are carnivalesque facets to the poetry slam and the limits to seeing carnival in the slam. The divide between the two chronotopes can be discerned by analyzing the spatial practices and experiences in which people participate. The chronotope of the coffee shop's ordinary operations and the chronotope of the poetry slam have each been connected with sets of practices relating to how people move through the site, how they seat themselves, and how they orient their visual and auditory senses. The practices enunciate different constructions of the space that reproduce the chronotopes. In distinguishing the two chronotopes, the carnivalization of the poetry slam has been explored.

As Bakhtin (1973:108) asserted, the source and expression of carnivalization has "deteriorated and dispersed" since medieval times from the bacchanalian revelry of frequent festivals. The degree of carnivalization may not be as complete as Bakhtin (1968) attributed to the writings of Rabelais, but attributes of carnival within the slam demonstrate that carnival is still relevant for explaining the spatial dialogue of poetry slams as a contemporary form of resistance. By examining the spatial manifestation of carnival, we build a clearer view of one level where carnival takes effect in a particular contemporary context. Poetry slam participants enunciate a separate carnivalized chronotope outside the everyday. The space is transformed during the poetry slam through different spatial practices while the material context largely

remains unaltered. The space is appropriated away from being solely the realm of the coffee shop and becomes a performance space.

The room is not ideally suited for performance because of the built environment's design constraints, but the poetry slam takes advantage of the space once a month to host its own version of carnival. Not everything changes, though. The intended purposes of the built environment still provide a structuring element to the social appropriation of the space. Like in the coffee shop's normal operations, people can move through the space and follow typical procedures. Customers can still exhibit proper everyday behavior sitting in chairs, stools, and couches sipping their drinks, and chatting with friends during the poetry slam, demonstrating the overlap between chronotopes. Although these everyday activities continue, the audience takes over the space and turns it into a place of collective participation and interaction, just as a carnival should be. In the observations conducted, carnivalesque characteristics could be discerned in the spatial dialogue of the poetry slam while still being shaped by elements from the ordinary operations of the coffee shop.

So what separates a coffee break from a spoken word performance? Maybe just a change in attitude and a little reorientation in how to use a space is all it takes to change the spatial dialogue. In the terms of social science, the two are just a chronotope away. Although the two sets of practices occur so close together in physical terms, each practice is implemented only "through the gates of the chronotope" (Bakhtin 1981:252). Despite their differences, the intersections of the chronotopes articulate greater social and rhetorical frameworks of meaning that can be examined by the inquisitive scholar.

CHAPTER FIVE

POETIC PERSPECTIVES:

POETRY SLAMS AND THEIR PARTICIPANTS

"My little children, why do ye not learn poetry? Poetry would ripen you; teach you insight, friendliness and forbearance; show you how to serve your father at home; and teach your lord abroad; and it would teach you the names of many birds and beasts, plants and trees." (Confucius 2011:58)

Something inside people draws them to speak, listen, and change. From a simple exchange of pleasantries at a cash register to a prolonged argument over which dining establishment is best, these social connections occur constantly in people's lives. Poetry slams provide a venue for speaking and listening that could affect people both on and off the stage. Participants come to the slam for different reasons bringing varying levels of experience with poetry, writing, and performing. Attitudes towards the slam and how it functions, the performances, and the ideas expressed illustrate commonalities and differences among participants' perceptions of the poetry slam. By delving into the dialogue of the poetry slam, the role of resistance can be uncovered.

The role of resistance in the poetry slam will be found through analysis of the observed interactions and the viewpoints provided in interviews about the poetry slam. An event such as the poetry slam potentially can create an avenue for resisting stagnation by realizing new ways to think about and interact with people and the world they live in. This will increase understanding of how people confront the pressures of their everyday life in creative ways. In this chapter, I explore these issues drawing on information gathered from in-depth interviews and through

participant observations. Participants shared information about their experiences with poetry both within and outside the slam. They discussed who they connect with at the slams, how they participate, how they think the poetry slam works, and the effects that come from participating in this artistic form. The motivations, themes, and the politics of poetry for participants provide additional insight into the reasons why people participate in slams and what they care about.

A lens for understanding the poetry slam as a potential site of resistance is provided by Bakhtin's concept of carnival. The carnival, for Bakhtin is a site in which social order becomes inverted and dominant discourses are challenged. To evaluate the role of carnival in the poetry slam, first the behaviors and the perceptions of the participants need to be shown and discussed as dialogue and dialogic action. Subsequently, the concept of carnival will be applied to see if the poetry slam matches the criteria for carnival. The poetry slam experience outside of the event itself will also be discussed to explore if there are traceable ties between words and actions expressed in the slam and actions taken outside of the poetry slam to affect change in the world. Together, these different elements demonstrate whether the experiences and perceptions of participants at the poetry slams correspond to carnivalesque resistance.

Poetic Dialogue

Since the first poetry slam in Chicago was organized, numerous slam events have popped up around the world. Poetry slams are open to the public which draws in many first-time poets in addition to veteran poets. A great diversity of experience exists among the participants. I saw first-time performers compete at the same time as former members of National Poetry Slam teams. Some people who compete started from other artistic backgrounds such as musicians, hip hop MC's, academics who study poetry, rappers, actors, and spoken word artists. Poetry Slams

61

enthusiasts claim that these events provide an equal opportunity for people to share, contest, and protest.

How poetry slams are organized provides insight into whether interactions at poetry slams are dialogic action which is the basis around which a carnival can form. Structural differences exist in how poetry slams provide an opportunity for dialogue to occur. Many Poetry slams follow a similar format, but each takes on different attributes based upon their local cultures, demographics, and geography. The two poetry slams examined for this study show moderately differentiated ways to organize the poetry slam as an event. The Open Counter Poetry Slam, although registered with Poetry Slam, Inc. (the national poetry organization), does not send a team to the national poetry slam competition so it does not often have people with experience at that level of competition. This slam attracts quite a few young high school and college age students as performers and audience members. While they can be talented, these poets often do not have an extensive firsthand experience with the wider world of poetry performances. By contrast, the Rue Vermilion Poetry Slam has a greater level of formal connections with other poetry slams. They send a team to the national competition and also as part of the national competition process host and send teams to special poetry slams that qualify groups to go to the National Poetry Slam. While each local slam is in dialogue with the national poetry slam movement, the Rue Vermilion Poetry Slam has a greater presence in the national dialogue by sending teams itself and hosting regional poetry slams as part of its participation with Poetry Slam, Inc.

Normally, both of the slams studied use the same three round open mic format where anyone can sign up and perform. Still, while the Rue Vermilion slam and Open Counter poetry slams both have the same opportunities for new poets to get involved, the Rue Vermilion slam

attracts more competitive poets who spend time practicing, editing, and preparing for their performances. These experienced poets make the Rue Vermilion Poetry Slam a more intense slam to participate in than the Open Counter Slam. Riley and K-Dog specified that having been to the more competitive event as observers they were more apprehensive of participating at the Rue Vermilion Poetry Slam and similar poetry slams. K-Dog said, as far as considering performance at the Open Counter Poetry Slam,

> "I've thought about it. I've written stuff and thought 'Oh I could totally do this' and then I've just never…actually…got the guts to do it. Although here [at the Open Counter Poetry Slam], I'd be much more likely to do it here. It seems a lot less competitive than the um… slams at [Blissville]".

Riley exhibited a similar sentiment in saying:

> "For this one [Open Counter Poetry Slam], I don't really care if I do poorly or anything. I think if I went to [Metro City], I'd put more of an effort into it because there's more professional poets down there and I'd spend time memorizing it. I'd actually care how I did."

Among the reasons given were the higher quality of poetry and the level of competition which made it a more imposing challenge to take on. The Rue Vermilion has ties to formal structures that increase the level of competition in the eyes of these participants. By comparing the two slams, the participants showed that the greater possibility for progression to different levels of competition at the Rue Vermilion poetry slam potentially involves a more daunting performance opportunity. Involvement in these greater structures like Poetry Slam, Inc increases the awareness of competition and that involvement can lead to higher levels of competition at regional and national slam events.

Despite the differing views on the competitiveness of each slam, both slams follow a very similar format. Poetry slams have a competitive format that requires a system of judging to evaluate the performers and dictate a winner. The regular format used in the two slams observed was to have the host ask for five volunteers from the audience to be judges for that night's poetry slam. Each judge would give each performance a score between 0.0 and 10.0. The highest and lowest scores given are dropped and the middle three are added together for the final score. The reason for dropping the highest and lowest scores was, to paraphrase a common saying used by the hosts of both slams, because "everyone has a friend in the audience and everyone has an enemy." This eliminates the most extreme scores and is an attempt to balance things out. The system of judging has a simple structure, but attitudes among those interviewed were mixed about the ways judges are selected and how they do their duty.

Barry, the host of the Open Counter poetry Slam mentioned that difficulties arose at that poetry slam when attempting to choose judges who were not friends or family of the performing poets. According to Barry,

> "Recently we've had some problems with poets saying some of the judges are
>
> other poets' friends. That happens, because I want to get the judges picked out
>
> before the program and the only people here before the program are the poets and
>
> their friends. And so I do have that complaint from a lot of poets. But that's
>
> kinda built into the system because we have five people off of the street and the
>
> lowest score and the highest score get cut off. "

Various people, including Riley, had brought up the issue to Barry in person of performer's friends being judges. In conducting my research, Riley and Devon reiterated their observations of seeing friends as judges and their view that it was a problem. Although Barry acknowledged

that it was not ideal, he pointed out that the scoring system of dropping the highest score reduces the bias somewhat as long as no more than one friend gets chosen as a judge. The participants at the Rue Vermilion did not bring up the same concerns about a flaw in the judging system. However, the Rue Vermilion slam was more particular about enforcing a rule that only those who did not know a performer could be judges.

Part of the reason for the difference in enforcing a rule about friends as judges between the two sites might lie in differences in the populations. The Open Counter Poetry Slam pulls from the relatively small population center of College Town and the surrounding areas which are mostly similarly sized towns with a few smatterings coming occasionally up from Metro City. The Rue Vermilion Slam draws its crowd from the metropolitan population of Metro City which includes a larger and more diverse artistic community. The much larger population surrounding Rue Vermilion likely draws in greater amounts of people unfamiliar with each other that negates the problems felt in the Open Counter Slam. In the Open Counter Slam, one can identify groups who know each other from local high schools, the nearby university, or those connected with local artistic endeavors based on who came in with whom and by seeing these groupings sit or stand near each other. The Rue Vermilion also had groups that clumped together, but there appeared to be a significant amount of people who were either there for the first time or who were just passing through compared with the Open Counter Poetry Slam. A further inquiry into the demographics and groupings would be needed to gain concrete evidence to support the inferences being drawn from the observations of both poetry slams. Every slam has its different quirks based on the local population and culture that has grown up around the slam so there may also be other factors involved beyond those suspected.

Another element of dialogue concerning the system of judging was the judges' experience with poetry. Quite a bit of enthusiasm was expressed for the fact that poetry slams are open to people who have never done anything with poetry before. Some of the interviewees reflected this enthusiasm in their belief that in choosing judges, it is a good thing to have people with little experience with poetry. If a poet has too much experience they might be too harsh or too tightly connected into the slam community to feel they can be objective. Angel counted himself out as a possible judge at slams because,

> "That's kinda across the board, no matter what the rules are, you aren't allowed to know somebody who's in the slam. You aren't allowed to be related to, be sleeping with, be buddies with, and that kind of rules me out every time. I'll know the poets or … they just don't want somebody with an experienced ear because that creates a bias. That's why poetry [slams] began in the first place, to give it back to the audience, see what the audience likes, and it's really cool that way. Because people who've never been to poetry slams before will start listening to poetry and you see what the world outside of the snooty greater-than-thou poetry inner circle, what the actual world, what the average person thinks. It's cool, I love that about it."

As Angel mentions, trying to have people with less poetry slam experiences and connections is meant to keep poetry slams grounded so that regular people participate and keep it from becoming an elitist event. Slam host Steve from Café Vermilion, with over a decade of slam participation, agrees, in part because he says "I tend to give myself fives, I tend to be a little rough….It needs to feel like it's being said in a different way". Poetry slams are often compared to poetry readings where poems can be too complex with literary devices and abstractions that

only a few literati and academics can appreciate which restricts participation of audience members. Poetry slams, on the other hand, tend to include inexperienced judges whenever possible. The engagement of 'non-experts' and their involvement as judges supports the idea that poetry slams are forms of dialogic action. However, some of the poets interviewed expressed frustration over the way the judging system is setup. These interviewees expressed concerns over the lack of criteria used to judge and over the accuracy of the judges. Devon, for example, related his experiences as a new participant. He had participated twice where he took on the role of judge once and performed as a poet the other time and described it saying:

>"Well it was interesting, kinda being forced to judge people [like] that. There's no
>
>uniform style or standard or whatever for the poetry slam. It's not like sonnets,
>
>you can judge sonnets based on their meter and their rhyme schemes. But poetry
>
>slams, it's sort of a free style in that regard so the way that I felt I had to judge
>
>was almost whimsical. It came down to: "Did I like what they said, did I like the
>
>presentation, the complexity of their thoughts, or not". You know, because
>
>there's no standard rubric by which to judge, it might've happened that the
>
>calibration of my judgment was different versus later on. I thought it was an
>
>interesting experience because, like I said, the poetry slam you're dealing with a
>
>variety of styles a variety of topics and it's really hard to boil it down to just a
>
>unitary number that you can kind of gauge everybody by."

Riley and others concurred that judging was hard because of the variety of poetic and performance styles that often changed with each new poetry slam. Some judges were believed to be swayed too much by one aspect of a poem and not factoring in the other elements. When a poem was about certain issues that the audience and judges were in favor of, they were perceived

as getting higher scores despite the lack of complexity in their use of language or a weakness in their performance quality. Those who perceived an issue in this area believed that the judges failed to give enough weight to the literary complexity of the poems.   One poet pointed out that the great thing about the slam is that it does have the randomness of inexperienced poets, making poetry slams somewhat of a game of chance. A tension exists between those who advocate for the need for inexperienced judges to keep the poetry approachable at a slam event while balancing it against the desire for poets to feel they have been evaluated fairly.

The poetry slam incorporates a simple method to keep in check the power of the judge to give scores that advance poets in the competition. The hosts of poetry slams, when calling for scores from the judges and announcing the combined score to the crowd, encourage the crowd to give their reaction to the scores being given. If the audience agrees they cheer and if they disagree, they boo. At the Rue Vermilion Slam, some audience members also liked to yell out their opinions mocking the hosts, judges, or poets depending on their attitude about the scoring. The Open Counter hosts also encouraged the audience to vocalize their feedback, but generally in the events observed audience reactions were restricted to cheering or booing without playful mocking. The audience's interactions put them in a dialogue with the judges and may or may not help the judges calibrate their scores through the progression of the poetry slam. By having the judges encounter feedback, the possibility of monologic actions by the judge is countered since they are put into dialogue with the hosts and audience. These elements of judging at poetry slams demonstrate opportunities for dialogue with regard to the role of the judge in the poetry slam. Concern over the judging of the competition involves a balancing act between bringing in and incorporating new people into the audience and, on the other side, judging the poetry slam while also keeping higher criteria for poets to encourage higher quality work. Poetry slams need

new blood; therefore, they need to be approachable as there can be considerable turnover in who comes to the slams as well as many people who only come occasionally and not every week or every month that the slams occur. The selection of a new set of five judges from the audience at each poetry slam creates chances for different people to score the poets. This engages new voices in dialogue on the judging end with the poets and audience. Through the slam's basic structure, the poetry slam keeps things simple by not having permanent, professional judges like those in reality TV shows who rip into people that do not conform to strict standards. Reality TV style judges have a huge say week to week in what goes on in their contest, whereas a poetry slam judge is temporary and is one of several voices at work in this competition. The structuring of the poetry slam resists over-regulating the performances. The structure of the poetry slam depends on the actions of the participants to take advantage of the opportunities for dialogue created by the event.

Poetry in Action

People take advantage of the opportunities provided by the poetry slam for different reason and participate to varying degrees. Poetry slam goers bring with them a range of experiences that affect how they participate in the event. They also draw on different motivations and perform in different ways. Not all participants share the same views or act in the same ways and the differences between them help define the dialogue of the poetry slam. The dialogue requires the continued interaction of participants and incorporates opposing viewpoints. The dialogic actions taken by the poets, hosts, and audience members contribute to the identity of the poetry slam which continually changes with the behavior of the participants. The diversity of people's experiences can influence how they participate in the slam. The interviewed poets explained their approaches to preparing for the poetry slam differently. Riley,

69

a 23 year old native of College Town who has participated at the local slam for the last two years off and on, specified that she would ignore poetry completely for a whole month until just before the poetry slam and then write madly to get a new piece ready for performance. Others like Admiral Wolverine Lightningbolt, a 19 year old student living in Metro City, are heavily involved with local youth poetry groups that get together to help each other edit their works into better performance poems. Another approach used by a lot of first time performers, like twenty-eight year old graduate student Devon, simply involves taking poems that had previously been written down in one sitting and bringing that up to perform. Poets who have been about their craft for a long time, such as small business operator fifty-eight year old John, can pull from a repertoire of dozens of poems when they come to the poetry slam. Some of these approaches emphasize the solitary nature of the poet, while others turn poetry into a collective effort with editing and encouragement along the way.

As can be seen in these examples, the poets' approach preparing for the slam reflects the connections they have with a larger poetic community. A. W. Lightningbolt talked about the connections he made with local poetry writing groups that help him refine his work. The other examples from Devon and Riley show poetry as a solitary creation that comes in bursts of creativity that needs to be shared. A set method of preparing for the poetry slam is not shared by all the participants in the competition. This allows people to use different tactics to get ready for the slam. The variability of the approaches people take to the slam and their level of involvement in poetry in general had no observed effect on their ability to begin participating in the poetry slam.

Alongside the different approaches of preparing for a slam, two categories of poets were identifiable in the slam: amateur poets and well-known poets. The amateur poets were those

either fairly new to poetry performance or who put less effort into preparing their performances for the competition. These poets were seen as needing to refine their performance skills in their elocution, timing, and bodily comportment when on stage. Amateurs were divided from the professionals by the level of complexity of their poetry as far as literary devices used and the originality of their compositions. The well-known poetry slammers put a lot of time into preparing. Some of them even made a living as a poet and became professional poets. Poetry slams draw people with experience at writing poems that do not have much skill with performance and also people who perform who may not have the best poetry writing skills. Many poets performing have both sets of skills to one degree or another. Poetry slams work to incorporate people of different skill levels. Although it might be thought that the well-known poets would have an edge, in observations, a number of first time or relatively amateur poets gained excellent scores and progressed through the three rounds of the poetry slams. The poetry slam incorporates this dialogue of amateur versus well-known and is meant to be a place where both can participate.

Poetry slams are competitions for amateurs and professionals alike. Of those interviewed, only Angel, a former native who was back visiting College Town and its resident poetry slam, currently had his only source of income from his poetry. Others who were interviewed had spent years in the poetry slam scene either at their current poetry slam home or in another city. These poets tended to be known within their local area. One local poet observed at the Rue Vermilion Slam even had requests for specific poems of theirs to be performed at slams, showing that the audience was aware of them and remembered their repertoire specifically. Some had been on a team for the national poetry slam competition and had a chance to meet poets from around the country at that national event.

71

Locally known poets were likely to be involved in the running of the poetry slam when they were not performing themselves. A number of them, like Barry and Steve, had hosted or still were hosts at poetry slams, helping to continue the traditions for selecting judges, prepping the crowd, keeping score, and handing out the prizes. Locally known poets also were more likely to have developed new friendships or to have brought in more friends to the poetry slam. Newer participants like Devon and K-Dog who had only been to the slam twice mentioned that they had come with a friend or found that people they already knew were at the slams. The new participants often had not had the chance to make new friendships at the slam, instead continuing established ones by bringing friends with them or by running into people they knew already at the poetry slam. New poets who had success in the slam were often greeted and congratulated by audience members, though whether they were making new friendships or reconnecting with friends this way was not ascertainable in the observations made. The known poets and the amateur poets alike had chances to make new connections and because of the judging system, stood a fair chance of continuing past the first round of the competition.

The rules for signing up for poetry slams are simple and do not favor the amateur or the professional. At both of the slams, a signup sheet would be posted at a certain time before the event officially began and whoever signed up first would be the participants for the night. Factors like knowing when to get to the event early enough or not knowing where to sign up if you were new might affect a person's participation, but for simplicity's sake, the signup sheet offers a fairly equal and democratic solution for gaining access to participation as a poet in the initial round. Christina, a first-time poetry slam performer, said that she did not even know she was going to participate until she showed up at the event and signed up. She performed well and even made it through to the third round. Progress through the competition depends on how the

72

amateur and well known poets present themselves and their work to judges who do not necessarily know who they are, depending on those judges' own levels of experience with the slam.

This democratic leaning of the poetry slam extends even to those who are famed for it. A number of well-known poets on the national level had their names dropped in several interviews. There was high regard for these poets. Poets like Anis Mojgani, Marc Smith, Saul Williams, Amy Everheart, Buddy Wakefield, and Andrea Gibson provided inspiration for many of the poets. In Angel's interview, he shared that he had met several of these nationally known poets. These poets attend their local slams and have to compete to join national poetry slam teams just like everyone else. At their local slams though, these well-known professional poets can be easy to approach and can become good friends. Angel maintained a friendship with a world individual poetry slam champion at his home poetry slam in the state he regularly lives in. At a poetry slam, these famous poets exist as 'touchable gods'. They can be talked to before or after the competition and become friends or enemies, depending how you treat them. Unlike in everyday life where famous people try to keep ordinary people at a distance, the poetry slam provides a place where the distance created by fame will not necessarily give you preferential treatment or keep you out of the crowd with everyone else. If these nationally known poets want to participate in the National Poetry Slam competition, they have to win local slam events and earn a spot on a team going to the National Poetry Slam each year, just like any other poet.

For some, the distinction between everyday life and the poetry slam is blurred by seeking to make poetry their profession. The market for slam poetry is nowhere near as big as hip hop music but there are opportunities that some of the poets can take advantage of to make money. There are opportunities for less well-known poets to do tours by taking advantage of existing

73

events and signing on as guest acts before poetry slams. One poet mentioned in an interview was said to live out of his van and not make a lot of money, but interviewed poet Angel had respect for him pursuing the dream of getting paid to perform poetry. Pursuing a career in poetry does not guarantee success, but it is possible. Angel, who is pursuing a career as a poet, had this to say:

> "You know, I've always thought that you need to do what you love or you're going to be miserable. So many people only do what they feel they should do because it's safe. I can't do that because the only point I can see to life is to be happy because if you're not happy, what the fuck are you doing. You got to get there, you gotta at least feel you're in the pursuit. So yeah, I think that's what I'm going to go for, within a year of doing this I've gotten quite a bit of success and hopefully, knock on wood, I'll get going from here. I'm well set up, well placed within the community who've made a living doing this. I mean I'm not going to be living in million dollar houses or anything like that, but if we're happy then, fuck, I'd still be doing it even if there weren't any money in it.

The nationally well-known poets were said to be more likely to be able to make income from their poetry. National poets go on tours to make money from performances while visiting universities, as featured poets before poetry slams, or other performance venues. Some also make money through publishing poetry books or through recording contracts. As Craig and Dubois (2010:457) found in their study of poetry economies, the poets who want to make a living out of their writing and performing have to navigate the complexities of both appealing to the audience and writing art for art's sake

74

Motivations

People are inspired to participate in poetry slams by different motivations. The poets interviewed gave a complex picture of the motivations that inspired them, but each of them touched mainly on the three motivations: the desire to express and share their thoughts and emotions with others, the desire to compete and improve artistically and the desire to win.

Two separate events illustrate the use of the poetry slam for emotional expression. During one poetry slam, a female poet had made it through the first two rounds of the competition. In between the second and third rounds, the host introduced a man who said he wanted to try his hand at poetry but had not entered in the competition. The man turned out to be the boyfriend of the poet and, through his reading of his poem, he proposed.

Another, more somber, event that took place was an act of communal mourning. A young poet who had come often and performed at the poetry slam had taken his own life. The host and a few of the participants in the competition read poems addressed to the young man. They had known him either from the poetry slam or from being classmates at his high school. They dealt with his death publicly in front of all of those in the audience, sometimes raging against a world that could bring this end and other times grieving for what had been lost.

These two events show extremes on the emotional spectrum that put the emotions of the poet in dialogue with that of the crowd. As an observer of each event, with full disclosure in mind, I admit that each event made me choke up and my eyes got watery. These occurrences highlight how poets can use their time at the stage to create an emotional dialogue with the audience. The emotional dialogue creates a therapeutic outlet for discussing how one feels and seeing that others respond to the same feelings. They also demonstrate the flexibility of the

poetry slam to incorporate actions outside of the competition which still contribute to the atmosphere of the event as a whole.

Many performers I interviewed indicated that their participation was motivated by a desire to express and share their thoughts and emotions with others. The poet Riley had this to say about sharing at a slam,

"Cause if you don't [share] then it just shrivels up inside of you. That's my favorite part of slamming, is getting my emotions out into the open. That's just what I do when I have something to say, I write it down and I'm crafting that into a listenable piece of poetry, is getting that out into the world. You know, some people just write it down in their journal, but I'm one of the those people that have to be seen. . . . Love and hate and politics and all of that stuff has to get out."

The sharing of emotions takes those emotions outside of the individual and puts them into dialogue with others. The emotions expressed provide an outlet for internal turmoil and let others hear how the poet thinks through the problems of love, life, and tragedy. Barry, the host of the Open Counter Poetry slam, described his motivation to be involved with putting on and participating in the poetry slam in this way

"The character I play as the slammaster…is basically a rodeo clown. And that's why I'm in silver cowboy boots and tie-dye because these people are riding the wild horses of love in their life because love is the most common thing they are going through at that age that they don't have a handle on, or the rage of a bull, they have a rage about something that's happened to them. These are poets who are sensitive and eloquent about speaking about what's going on and there's a sense of rage, which I consider the bull, or there's a sense of out of control with

76

love and they get up here and express it. And what I do is I allow them a safe

place to do that where they won't get attacked by the audience. "

 Desmond, who was a poet visiting from another state, stated that his motivation for getting

involved was "not slamming to win slams, slamming more to contribute to the dopeness that

everyone else is offering as well." Barry and Desmond's statements show a desire to facilitate

the expression of others while participating in the poetry slam. Through their participation, Barry

and Desmond sought to make the poetry slam a safer, less intimidating place for others to

express themselves. At the same time, the audience can be seen in dialogue with the emotions

expressed which helps validate and alleviate the feelings of the poet.

As for the motivation just to win, none of the poets interviewed identified themselves as

participating with that as their main reason. The winning motivation was mentioned in a

negative manner by some of the poets like Elus1ve One who said

"I've seen people come in with their friends as judges lots of times with the high

scores and it seems biased at times. But you just kind of try to shrug it off, you

know. You're not there for the money or the fame, just kinda there to speak your

mind and see what others get from it."

Several interviewees said that there were those they perceived as people who crafted and

performed their poems specifically to try and win rather than as a way to express their own

feelings. The interviewees did seem reluctant to name specific names of people they thought

were motivated by just the thought of winning. According to Angel,

"There are a few, there are a few poets out there who just want to win, there are

poets who just want to win, who write about certain subjects that are crowd

pleasers and do it to win. Those people just picked the wrong thing, you know

because no matter how famous you are in poetry slams you'll only be fame-ish,

you know. It's just not worth it."

 Those motivated to win were said to use various strategies to try and win. Interviewed poets like Desmond and Admiral Wolverine Lightningbolt did mention the strategies they used in their own performances like choosing poems that fit the same emotional or political themes espoused by other poems that night or using one of their own poems that was well-received in the past at a slam. However, the use of these strategies was not limited to a motivation just to win. Desmond and Lightningbolt identified their motivations as not just a desire to win for financial or ego purposes, but as a means to expand artistically by pushing and getting pushed through comparison and consultation with other poets. Performance studies scholar Dillard (2010: 222) points out that the poetry slam is "an excursion into aesthetics" and poets can use those same winning strategies as a means to make more artistic impact instead of just aiming to win. The poet Billy shared this belief indicating that when she first started performing at poetry slams, she played more into the competitive nature of the poetry slam by focusing on winning. Later on after having been in the slam community for a while, she became more comfortable and focused on being true to expressing her own beliefs and meanings rather than catering strictly to what the crowd might like. The poetry slam provides an arena for the poets aiming to enhance their artistry by letting them see what others did poetically and to find out how their own performances compared or contrasted with what the audience and judges enjoyed.

Although the motivation to express oneself and improve their artistry was expressed by most of the poets interviewed, a few indicated that they were more motivated to compete than the others. The dialogue about competitions appropriateness for poetry led to some debate. Some like Elus1veOne did not participate to compete because they primarily wanted to use the

slam as a performance opportunity, not as a place to be judged and categorized numerically. Elus1ve One stated, "But yeah, I mean, yeah, judging's not big on me, I don't let it affect me, but at the same time, I don't affect it. I don't feed into it. I kinda just play off of it." Others had been observed who shared this sentiment. At one slam event, a poet performed in the first round of the competition and got high enough scores to go to the next round, but he left before the second round even began and did not come back. The competitive aspect of the poetry slam distinguishes it from a basic open mic poetry reading. Dialogue is a multi-voiced affair with multiple elements coming together, and for the poetry slam, the competition provides one of those elements, but not to the exclusion of others. While the competition is always a factor because of its central role in the organization of poetry slams, the motivation to express oneself was the preeminent reason to participate given by those interviewed. Poets and audience members found ways to express and relate their emotions to each other through their participation in the event. The competition still takes place, but as long as they can express themselves, the poets opposed to the competitive aspect of the slam were happy enough to perform. For others, a combination of expression and artistic improvement through competition drew them to participate. The poets act dialogically by participating in the poetry slam while still opposing elements of it. How they are motivated can affect what they do in their performing and how the audience reacts to their actions.

Performance

Poets draw on their own interests and experiences to craft a performance to go with the poems that they have created. For their performances, they have to figure out what to say and how to say it effectively. The performers draw on different topics, use different styles, and have different skill levels with spoken word performance. Because poetry slams are often open mic

events where anyone can sign up, the variety can fluctuate depending on who shows up. Through performance, poets create a dialogue with the audience.

The topics that poets draw on span a world of possibilities. Poets can spell out their thoughts on past loves, political events, broken families, sexuality, newfound romance, religious conviction or doubt, concern about the environment, and anger against authority of all types. Though this is not an exhaustive list of potential topics, each theme given here was identified by at least one of the interviewees as a topic that poetry slam performers have used. Poetry slams are touted by the hosts, many poets and the literature as a place where people can broach any topic from whichever perspective the poet chooses (Glazner 2000:180. The belief in the slam's openness that was reiterated by the interviewees would indicate that the poetry slam provides a forum for topics that in regular, everyday life might be frowned upon. The adage that one should not talk about sex, religion, and politics has been turned upside down in the poetry slam. Depending on the topic and how it is presented, the poet can either bring the audience along for an adventure or turn them off and not make any real connection.

On top of the different topics, many styles of performance come to the poetry slam. Artists like Elus1ve One come from a hip hop/spoken word background. Elus1ve One said "I got started with friends just free styling to beats and MC-ing and stuff and it's grown into what it is now." Hip hop MC's bring their own style of spoken word to the poetry slam that sounds like it should have a beat track behind it. Poets like Barry, the Open Counter slam host come from a theatrical background and emote like a Shakespearean actor. In Barry's experience,

> "… I've been a writer for a long time. I write everything, I write stories, plays, screenplays, I've started novels. I'd never been a big fan of poetry because there was a time during the 90's when it became very academic where in order to be

called a poet they had to write what I considered pretty hard to decipher stuff.

And I thought that was silly ridiculous but when I saw there was a place, many

places around the country where they were taking public presentation and poetry

and mix the two together. "

Others are so new to poetry performance they are still trying to figure out their own method,

which can bring out very unique styles. Not everyone likes all the styles that can come into a

poetry slam. Riley and Angel both disliked the hip hop styles; while on the flipside, Elus1ve

One thought that poetry was going back to being more musical again. The different styles at the

slam do not always mesh together well, but each style can influence people to experiment and try

different things. One hip hop MC who frequents the Open Counter Slam, Darwin, usually

performs with a hip hop rhythm to his pieces, but also has tried his hand with a more spoken

word poetry style. Styles end up coming into dialogue with one another and leading people

down paths they might not have attempted otherwise.

The openness attributed to the poetry slam does allow a great amount of free expression.

Poets at each of the slams visited for this study were seen to use vulgar language, describe

raunchy and erotic sex, and express both progressive and anarchistic political views. Angel

shared this:

"No there are definitely poets, there are poems that are just like, you know, tear it

down, tear down the system. A buddy of mine, he's published with a company

called Criminal Class and all their authors are convicted felons and he talks about

that a lot and hating Nazis and one thing or another ….but then [another friend]

has a poem he'll do in the next round that'll be about his penis."

81

In my observations, I witnessed performances discussing suicide, incitation to revolution, erotic lesbian lovemaking, and a poem about revenge on a rapist. In polite everyday conversation, these topics would be taboo for many people, yet at the poetry slam, they are shouted out from the stage.

To test the counterfactual of the openness seen in my observations, interview participants were asked if they had heard poets that they disliked at poetry slams and if that had limited the participation of those poets in the poetry slam. I will share a few examples from the interviews. Riley explained that she disliked poets who were very angry and used violent language in their poems but that the poets themselves were not necessarily limited in their competitive success because of this. Alternatively, Devon and Angel both said that they disliked poets that lacked complexity in the literary devices used to construct the poem, hitting more at the structure rather than the theme of the message. Angel also mentioned a poet from another state's slam who he hated that did white power poems and threw up Zieg Heil salutes in his performances. The level of dislike for these poets varied with the white power poet being the most disliked among those mentioned to me, while the poets who did simplistic poems were considered more of an annoyance than people who were hated.

The preferences shared by the interviewees indicate a dialogical engagement with the types of poetry performed at the slam. Just as a person in dialogue has to account for opposition, the poetry slam participant has to recognize the parts of the poetry slam they do not enjoy. Elus1ve One clarified,

> "I've never really come into conflict. Maybe not come into conflict, maybe come
>
> into a bit of misunderstanding something just because I don't view that persons

perspective as they view it. So I'm just kind of not knowing exactly what they're wanting me to see or feel, I guess."

Others expressed a particular dislike, such as Riley's distaste for very angry, aggressive poems. However, despite being identified as poets or types of poems that were disliked by the interviewees, each of the disliked poets, even the white power poet mentioned by Angel, were noted as continuing to perform or be performed at poetry slams. If the disliked poems and poets were excluded from the poetry slam, that exclusion would be monologic action which would limit how people can participate. Even with the negative reactions felt about the disliked poets, the slam still was open to their performances. Poets can still slam things they dislike in their performances, yet in this case, they are engaging in dialogue because a response can come back via the same medium. The openness attributed to the poetry slam seems, in the cases shared by the interviewees, to be afforded even to those who can turn off others with their performance style or the topics covered.

Given the format of the poetry slam in using three rounds, the noncompetitive poets expressed frustration that they might only get time for performing one poem if their scores were not high enough. For the performer, knowing that the judges' scores will determine whether you get a chance to perform beyond the first round can be frustrating if you are not focused on the competitive nature of the slam. As discussed earlier, some poets did not like the judging taking place without any particular yardstick for performance quality. These poets want to continue participating in the poetry slam's ongoing dialogue. Their concern is about monologic action being taken that might exclude them from the same opportunities as others.

This not only held them back from going further in the competition, but also did not give specific feedback beyond the numbers from the judges. And since those numbers do not come

83

with a specific breakdown based on the structure, content, and performance of the poetry piece, it can be intimidating especially for a first time performer. If performers want more detailed feedback, they will have to look for it outside of the judging format of the competition and seek direct commentary from people in the audience. As it is, they have to make inferences from the clapping, cheering, booing, or silence of the crowd about how well they have done. A broader dialogue outside of a direct judge's score to poet has to be engaged in to figure out how to improve. This situation shows limits to the opportunities that can be created for performances. This occurs because of the poetry slam's competitive nature and also more simply because of the time limits which poetry slams have. Poetry slams cannot last forever and in time must give way to everyday uses for the venue. Poetry slams can stretch the limits sometimes by having the event go longer to accommodate more poets in the lineup. Even when confronted by limits, the poetry slam and its participants push for more time, space, and opportunities for action.

The Case for Carnival

Poetry, long a pastime of the rich and educated, finds itself with the poetry slam to be an activity of the masses once again. Through the information gleaned from talking with slam participants and observation, the hope is to have provided insight into a contemporary event that provides a place for setting aside the constrictions of the everyday. The poetry slam has been shown to provide opportunities for dialogue to occur. The format of the event involves dialogic interactions not only with the poets performing to the audience, but also with the judges' scoring, the hosts' comments, and the crowd's response. As mentioned in the literature review, dialogue is the basis upon which carnival is built. Various facets of the dialogue involved with the poetry slams which has been discussed in this chapter will now be looked at through the lens of the

concept of carnival. To answer whether poetry slams are carnivalesque forms of resistance, the event needs to meet the criteria for carnival.

Many attributes that were observed at the poetry and discussed by the participants point to the manifestation of carnival attributes in the poetry slam. In carnival, Bakhtin said that both lofty and lowly ideas can be presented, the loved and hated, the emotional and the intellectual. First, people have to participate freely without restrictions that come from hierarchical positions held in everyday life. Second, participants can engage in profanation, which means they can say what they want to even if it violates social norms concerning speech and behavior. Thirdly, an inversion of the social hierarchy should occur. Inversion means that people and institutions like the Pope or the police department which are respected in everyday life can be mocked and joked about, putting them on the same level as everything else.

In addition to the carnival criteria, two other concepts contribute to the analysis. As discussed in Chapter Four, De Certeau gives the concepts of strategy and tactics which can be used in examining resistance. Strategies and tactics, when paired with carnival, can be seen as types of dialogic action that either follow the rules of everyday life or work to create a carnival atmosphere. Strategic actions are those taken following the established rules and regulations of a cultural system. Tactical action involves appropriating the opportunities provided in a social setting for uses other than those originally intended.

For the first criterion, the free participation of people can be seen in the poetry slam. The events are open to anyone who wanders in off the street. Anyone who walks in through the door at the beginning of the event has a chance to put down their name on the list to perform. There are some limits with a cap on the number who can sign up, but it's a first-come, first-perform situation. People do not get priority for signing up to perform. Friends of the host did not get

first dibs on performing nor did having a degree in Creative Writing push a person to the front of the line.   The poetry slams studied were very open to different people presenting on a multitude of topics. The variability of the approaches people take to the slam and the levels of involvement of the poets have no effect on their opportunity to begin participating in the poetry slam. The barriers limiting participation for poets are low. Even the most well-known, talented poets, when participating in a slam have to hope for good enough scores to move to the next round of competition. Of course, the well-known poets come in with more experience and a well-honed performance style which gives them an advantage, but they have the same opportunity to perform as the teenager who comes for the first time. The poetry slam fits the criteria for the carnival to be open to participation by all. The poetry slam also operates under its own rules that allow the appropriation of the performance opportunity by anyone who has a chance to sign up. Because the poetry slam shows that it is subject to "the laws of its own freedom", shedding the exclusivity of academic poetry circles and highbrow readings, the poetry slam fits the carnival criteria of being "a second life of the people, a festive life" (Bakhtin 1968:8).

The second criterion is profanation. Profanation can involve anything from using curse words to making lewd sexual gestures with a microphone. Profanation is the tactical appropriation of the performance opportunity to speak uncensored and release inhibitions. Poetry slam performances showed the profanation that a carnival atmosphere requires. Poets can get away with saying ridiculous or raunchy things. Poets did not shy away from using curse words not ordinarily spoken in public and calling for violent action against the government. Poets also performed poems that described intimate sexual acts between themselves and others. The sexual descriptions and curse words represent topics of conversation that lie outside everyday public speech. If the same descriptions and words were used publicly by a politician or

a student in class or at a place of work, social sanctions would likely castigate the person expressing them. In the poetry slam, this profane speech is allowed and even rewarded by the judges with high scores if done well. It adds levity to the atmosphere and encourages others to be more expressive about topics that may go ordinarily unaddressed. Profanation coincides with open and free participation by allowing people to speak familiarly to each other. It shows resistance against the constraints placed on language and behavior in everyday, public settings where there could be negative repercussions. At the poetry slam, the poet is more likely to get laughs than censorship.

The third criterion of inversion is related to the previous two criteria of open participation and profanation in that those two involve inversion. Education, wealth, and social status can confer higher positions of authority to people in everyday business. In the poetry slam, these factors mean a lot less. I saw people with degrees in English who wanted to study and write poetry as a career lose to teenage poets. In the poetry slam competition, wealth cannot buy you a pass to the second round. These social hierarchies still exist for categorizing people but are inverted so that they do not provide advantages. Even one of the central features of the poetry slam, the fact that it is a competition, can be mocked and ignored by the very people who participate in it.

The inversion of the competitions' importance can be seen in how some of the poets perceived the competitive format.   As in examples given earlier, some participants in the slam do not think poetry should be competitive. These same participants will perform at a poetry slam as a way of tactically appropriating the performance opportunity without any desire to win it. These performers take the structure of competition associated with the poetry slam, and tactically appropriate it despite their own intentions not to give in to the competitive side of the poetry

87

slam. Some poets and audience members saw the competitive format of the poetry slam as a way to encourage artistic improvement rather than as something to be won. Furthermore, as with the examples of the proposal and the communal mourning which were used to discuss the expression motivation, the competition can fade into the background when other actions during the poetry slam eclipse the interest in who becomes the champion of the evening. Bakhtin (1968) mentioned a similar phenomenon in the medieval carnival where there was a mock crowning of a "king" during the carnival. While the position draws attention, it lasts only so long as the carnival does. In the examples of the proposal and the mourning, these situations almost seemed to supplant the winner's triumph with the happiness of the couple and the emotions of the mourning crowd. Each occasion was motivated by the need to share emotions publically and, even though the competition was still in effect, made the event overall feel less like something to be won and rather something to be experienced. These occurrences invert the expectation that the winner will garner all the attention, in essence, making it a mock competition where the end result is not the most important part. The process of the poetry slam and what goes on is more important than who wins the competition. Inversion of the competitive aspect shows resistance in a couple of ways. Competition which is necessary for the poetry slam is taken from its position as a sacred and venerable aspect to something that can be mocked. The slam allows the profanation of its competitive aspect. This shows that even the event itself is not beyond the critical evaluation of its participants. The inversion of competition's importance also reflects how competition is an important part of everyday life. In the modern capitalist social order, people see competing as a means to succeed, gain a living, get a spouse, and get the best parking space. With the poetry slam, when competition loses importance, shows that other aspects like the therapeutic outpouring of emotion can be just as important as winning.

88

An inversion of the experience hierarchy could also be seen in the poetry slam. The dialogue concerning the judgment system displayed a tension between the roles of experienced versus inexperienced judges. Experienced judges were seen as too harsh while the inexperienced judges were thought to be swayed by the emotional parts of the poem and not see the inadequacies in the technical composition of the poem and its performance. By allowing anyone regardless of their knowledge of poetry to be a judge, the poetry slam again puts people on the same level.

Not all of the observations and interviews indicated resistance occurring in the poetry slam. Poets were mentioned who took part in the poetry slam competitions strictly to win and get the cash prizes that the slams each offered. Even the poets interviewed who cared about using the poetry slam for therapeutic expression found themselves strategizing about how to maximize their chances of getting a higher score and moving on to the next rounds. Also, the inversion of hierarchy applied to allowing anyone to enter the competition's first round, yet experience gained over the years through practicing and competing does give some poets more of an edge in getting higher scores. Although a few poets interviewed did not care about the competition, most of them still would have liked to win the competition. Even with the examples of profanation that some poets did, other poets stuck to mainstream, accepted topics that did not push boundaries the boundaries, instead using standard topics like love, family, and hope to make their appeals to the audience. The constraints of everyday life were still visible in their use of language and subject choice when participating in the poetry slam. Yet these limits to resistance lie mainly in how the poet uses the opportunity for dialogue given in the poetry slam. When participants chose to take advantage of it, the chance for carnivalesque action, to be profane and interact freely with others while inverting hierarchies, was still waiting for them.

89

The poetry slam was originally intended to return poetry back to the masses by taking poetry out of the academic realm and back into the everyday. The poetry slam's creation was an act of resistance against the academic establishment which is so full of specific criteria for the form and presentation that must go along with poetry. The resistant structuring of the poetry slam goes along with De Certeau's understanding of the tactic as something that occurs in a moment but that cannot continue to endure without becoming more substantive. In becoming a popular social movement, the poetry slam has been organized in ways that loosely provide a structure copied by different poetry slams throughout the world. This structure has also developed into national and world level competitions that draw on the same rules used at the local level. At the same time, despite the coalescence of a general structure shared by poetry slams, each slam still creates its own identity in dialogue with the local populations and their cultures. The general structure of the poetry slam can be malleable when occasion arises. [3] In this way, the poetry slam still resists full systematization.

Aftershocks: Resistance Beyond the Poetry Slam

Carnival has been theorized to open people up to see new possibilities. Through allowing the appropriation of the performance opportunity, the poetry slam shows itself to be that "open process of envisioning [that] which is not yet" (Gardiner 1992:25). Even though parts of the

---

[3] Specialty slams happen on occasion. I witnessed an all-female slam event that had all the poets perform in every round. Normally, half of the remaining poets are cut in each subsequent round until the final round in which only one winner is chosen. At the special slam, it was the cumulative scores from all the rounds that determined the final winner. Anecdotes also indicated other slams used different systems of judging or based rewards on different criteria as well. Billy mentioned that the Berkeley slam in the past gave a reward to the lowest scoring poet as well as the highest scoring. Even though many slams regularly follow similar sets of rules, systematization has not set the slam format in stone. In this way, poetry slams fit the criteria of resisting systematization which is expected for a critical utopia (Gardiner 1992:25).

general structure of the poetry slam have been systematized at each slam locale, such as the selection of judges, the number of rounds, the rules at each particular slam event, and the scoring process, the actual execution of a poetry slam still provides opportunities for carnivalized interaction through the performances themselves, the way the hosts interact with the judges, and how the crowd reacts to the poets and hosts.   In this way, the poetry slam is a carnival in that it provides a space outside of ordinary life where different carnivalesque rules are in play. The question this begs is: to what extent do local poetry slams fulfill this aspect of carnival as a critical utopia in affecting people's lives outside of the event itself. To ascertain if poetry slams have a critical utopian effect on life outside of the slam, interview subjects were asked about their political involvement outside of the poetry slam and whether the poetry slam had influenced their political activity. Many poets' performances broached subjects like immigration, slavery, racism, domestic violence, equal rights, and the right to marry in their observed performances and interviews. Those interviewed did not identify an instance in which poetry slams had directly influenced them to get involved with a new political cause. Some like Riley did indicate that the poetry slam helped reinforce their belief in some causes. She said that poets at the slam often touched on issues that she cares about like gay rights and women's rights. In particular, she said

> "It's nice hearing the words in their own creative way. And some, there's some poems
> that cut right through to my core because I agree with it so much. That was the reason,
> the perfect way to phrase it. And I feel. That's the reason that I watch so many poems,
> like really amazing poets that just have that ability to reach you on a level that nothing
> else can."

Although the slam had no reported direct effect in changing her political views, Riley did say that the poetry slam reinforced her existing political beliefs. These beliefs were reflected also in

the poetry that she shared at the poetry slam. Other poets also referred to having their beliefs

reflected in some of the poetry that was performed at the poetry slam.

Outside beliefs also serve to reinforce the desire to participate in the poetry slam. One

interviewed poet shared that he saw himself as part of the internet hacktivist group Anonymous.

He believes in the work of Julian Assange and Wikileaks that work to share the truth with the

world. His personal interpretation of poetry slams was that it was a forum for truth-telling along

the same lines as these other groups. He took part in the slams and helped plan them to give a

forum for people to share their personal and political beliefs in front of others. He and others can

dialogically participate, speaking their truths. According to him, many in the audience are aware

of his politics and are understanding when he performs poems that express them. When he

participates in the poetry slam, he tones down his politics and focuses on engaging the crowd

with the poetry slam. For this poet, his politics inspire his participation because of the

similarities he sees between his political views and the way the poetry slam provides a forum for

people to speak the truth. His beliefs and behavior contribute to the carnivalesque openness of

the poetry slam.

On the other hand, elements from everyday life can impinge on the poetry slam. Steve,

one of the slam hosts from Metro City, said that because he had a job in the civil government, he

had toned down the politics that he shared at the poetry slam. In the past, he had been more

forward about putting his politics into his performances. This restricts him somewhat from

engaging in political topics at the poetry slam, but still has great leeway in his approach to other

topics. In this case, the poetry slam does not fully invert the hierarchy of everyday life because

what he says could affect his job if he says anything too controversial. This did not stop Steve

from performing good comedic poetry on other topics besides current politics, however. Steve's

case suggests a limit to the extent that poetry slams can serve as a carnival in some aspects, yet carnivalesque actions continue to transpire.

Besides the effect on political participation and political beliefs outside of the poetry slam, Steve's fiancée Lynette, a ballet teacher, reported an artistic influence that the poetry slam had outside of the event. From knowing Steve and going to poetry slams, she found the poems inspiring and wanted to collaborate with Steve by choreographing a dance to go with one of his poems. The confluence of artistic interests outside of the poetry slam shows that Lynette was opened to a new possibility for expanding her own artistic repertoire. Steve and Lynette's example shows that there is an artistic opening to different potentials, showing a critical utopian influence in the artistic sphere.

None of the poets identified any major direct influence from their participation in the poetry slam on the political participation in their everyday lives. However, indirect influences were possible. The poetry slam may also play host to carrier groups which "share ideal and material interests" (Alexander 2003:94). Carrier groups reiterate messages that share meaning attached to the issues that bring the groups together in the first place. These groups tell stories that persuade people and reinforce an existing viewpoint that is held. Several subjects said that the political beliefs that other poets mentioned coincided with their own beliefs. They said that it was good to know other people were thinking about these same subjects and trying to understand them. By increasing understanding of an issue, people may have an increased awareness of a continuing issue, even if they already had knowledge about the issue. As Riley pointed out, having a place you can hear your political views reflected back to you in a creative way helps reinvigorate your belief system

For carnival critical utopia to happen, people have to open to new possibilities outside of the carnival event. The interviewees were specifically asked about the effect poetry slams had on their political beliefs and participation in ways that expressed those beliefs in the rest of their lives outside the slam. While no direct evidence was given showing that poetry slams invoked new possibilities that could get people to participate politically, the other examples discussed above show some possibilities being recognized. The idea of carrier groups operating in the poetry slam illustrates one means by which an influence can be had outside of the event itself. The carrier groups in the slam can disseminate information and renew interest in social problems in which a person had been previously interested. Additionally, outside factors such as political beliefs can influence how a person like the Anonymous member participates in the poetry slam. He wanted to share his viewpoint and show a wider range of society's problems to the audience at the poetry slam. Beyond political beliefs, though, the poetry slam did open up new possibilities for artistic possibilities such as Lynette and Steve's collaboration with dance and poetry. While the focus of the interview question was to see if political participation was affected, these examples demonstrate that the slam can still open up new possibilities for participants in ways not predicted by the researcher.

Stallybrass and White (1986:14) stated "the most that can be said in the abstract is that for long periods carnival may be a stable cyclical ritual with no noticeable politically transformative effects but that, given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as a catalyst and site of actual and symbolic struggle." The poetry slams observed were stable events that had lasted for many years at their current locations. Although political messages were given during performances and occasionally with rants from particular hosts, no direct politically transformative effect was noticed. However, as has been shown, the poetry

slam does have other ways of renewing and opening up new possibilities for participants. Thus, the poetry slam does fit the requirement to be a carnival critical utopia, just not in the manner that the researcher thought of in planning and conducting the interviews. A more in-depth study that focuses on how these other ways open up possibilities is needed.

Carnivalesque Conclusions

After the audio recorder has been turned off and the keyboard is put away, the dialogue about the poetry slam continues on. Each poetry slam, the cycle is renewed. The questions the researcher asked are not new, but the evaluation of the poetry slam as a site of carnivalesque resistance provided the direction for further inquiry. In attending and observing poetry slams, I was opened to the possibility that the poetry slam has carnival resistance.

Poets, judges, hosts, and the audience have been shown to be in a dialogue made up of words and actions. The organization of the poetry slam created opportunities for dialogue and the people acted on those opportunities. Conflict exists about how the poetry slam should be run and about why people participate in the poetry slam. People bring different attitudes and experiences to the plate that can come into opposition when they take advantage of the opportunities to perform and express. These examples of dialogue show that the poetry slam is carnivalesque in how it includes multiple conflicting views and turns them into part of the entertainment value of the event. This fits the open participation criteria for being a carnival. The poetry slam also fit the second criteria for carnival in that participants could engage in profanation. Not all poets did, but the possibility was there for them to take. Those who did take advantage of the chance to be profane did use it to dramatic effect. The poetry slam also saw the inversion of hierarchies based on education, wealth, and experience as a judge. In addition to meeting the three criteria for carnival, the poetry slams showed some evidence of being a critical

utopia. While the evidence for critical utopia did not come in the anticipated manner of political participation outside the poetry slam, sufficient evidence was seen to believe it was carnivalesque.

Despite some examples that may seem to detract from the conclusion, poetry slams show evidence of being carnivalesque resistance. Bakhtin himself said that carnivalization was not an inflexible framework to be applied and to fit in just such a way (Bakhtin 1973:139). He even says "the carnival and the carnival attitude have deteriorated and dispersed and have lost their nature of truly belonging to the whole people" (Bakhtin 1973:108). The carnival is a flexible way of interacting in the world to uncover new and different things. The poetry slam may not be a perfect carnival all the time with how people use their opportunities, but it is full of carnivalesque activity and attitudes. Resistance shown in the poetry slam provides relief from the strictures of everyday life and inverts the social order. Poetry slams provide a great example of how people can appropriate an art form to create a place where they can have dialogue with one another, expressing hopes, fears, dreams, hatred, love, and understanding.

CHAPTER SIX

CARNIVALESQUE CONCLUSIONS:

DIALOGUE ABOUT THE UNDERPINNINGS

"I am arguing with an idiot online.

He says anybody can write a poem.

I say some people are afraid to speak.

I say some people are *ashamed* to speak."

-from the poem "Anybody Can Write a Poem" by Bradley Paul (2010)

"And the poet who has won $20 and the glory of a Sunday night is…" says the slam host. The

scores are in, the final round has been performed, and the audience waits with baited breath.

Two poets stand waiting for their place to be told. Each has performed, expressing their hurts

and hopes. For a single night, one of them will be the poetry slam champion. After this night,

the process begins again, moving onward to the next moment. Poetry slams constitute an

ongoing, unfinalizable dialogue. Each week, performers come and go. Judges change each

week. The audience wants to hear different soul curdling stories about triumph, failure, life left

behind, and opportunities taken. And in the midst of this whispered dialogue, the poetry slam

pushes back the boundaries to make this a place of change, a place that allows difference.

When looking for the right perspective to research the poetry slam, I wanted to improve

my own and others' understanding of how poetry slams work and how they affects the world. I

read about Becker's art worlds, social performance theory, and cultural pragmatism before

coming to the works of Mikhail Bakhtin during a communication studies theory class. After

reading a brief paragraph about the carnival (and encouragement from my fellow students), I began to see the possibilities of carnival as a concept that could apply to the poetry slam. Carnival as described by Bakhtin includes laughter and the participation of the masses, and I could see these in the poetry slam as well. But what really got me interested in researching the possibility of the poetry slam being carnivalesque were the doubts that cropped up about whether the poetry slam truly was showing resistance, especially in the carnival manner. Was the poetry slam open to all or did some get excluded? Do people perform just to win fame and cash prizes? To alleviate my own curiosity and to clarify the usefulness of the carnival concept when describing contemporary forms of resistance, the research was begun.

In studying poetry slams, various pieces that collectively comprise these sites of cultural activity were analyzed. The two poetry slam cases chosen allow a look at the differences that can arise between poetry slams, but more importantly for this study, show the similarities that make poetry slams an open occasion for people to participate in. The thirteen interviewees gave valuable insight into the interviewees' own experiences in participating and their attitudes about the different aspects of the poetry slam such as the judging, the types of poems read, and other poets. This insight helps put in perspective the dialogue created by people describing how the poetry slam works from their perspective. Not every view point agrees, yet the interweaving parts give a better view of the greater conversation. The observations done at poetry slam events also add to the dialogue by taking into account actions witnessed firsthand by the observer, giving another perspective aside from the accounts gained through interviews. To analyze the data gathered, a two-pronged approach was taken. In Chapter Four, the spatial attributes of the poetry slam and its participant's behaviors were examined to see if they met the criteria of

carnival. In Chapter Five, carnival was looked for by listening to what was said about the poetry slam and by taking into account specific situations.

Having developed first in the context of literary criticism by Bakhtin, the concept of carnival has been taken out of the literary realm and placed in the social (Hufford 2010). Carnival occurs in certain times and spaces according to Bakhtin, such as medieval festivals (1968:8). To search for the carnival in the poetry slam, the space and time where the poetry slam occurs had to be analyzed as was done in Chapter Four. Participants at the Open Counter Poetry Slam were seen to modify their behaviors to act differently during the poetry slam as opposed to during the everyday operations of the same location in its role as a coffee shop. The poetry slam involved people appropriating the space to create a stage, make seating out of empty floors and stair steps, putting people closer together, and the performers coming from the audience and returning back to it. In these small acts, participants tactically appropriated the space for their own use in a carnivalesque manner by seeing different potentials for the physical assets of the coffeehouse.

Other criteria for carnival needed evaluation as well. The poetry slam proved to be an open event where those who wanted to could sign up to perform. In performing, these poets had few limitations beyond needing to perform a piece of their own work. Poets could broach taboo topics like very descriptive sex acts if they wanted or stick to the classics like love and heartbreak. The carnival involves profanation where words or topics not allowed in everyday polite conversation can be used as was seen in observed poetry slam performances and referred to by interviewees. The poetry slam also involved a competition that pushed poets to achieve more but at the same time, the saying that "the points are not the point, the point is poetry" rang true for several of those interviewed. The poets may want to win and be the best, but many of

them used the slam as a stage for therapeutic expression. The organization of the slam itself lends itself to a carnivalesque air of uncertainty with judges changing every time the poetry slam happens. The scoring of the judges can be based on whatever criteria the judge prefers and could or could not even be swayed by crowd reactions to the scores they are given. This keeps the slam from becoming too controlled and stale, with over specification of what must or must not be done. The uncertainty built into the judging keeps it from becoming a platform for monologue; instead, the system of judging allows the unfinalizable dialogue that Bakhtin believed in.

One interpretation of carnival which looks at the concept as a critical utopia was also examined. Carnival as a critical utopia envisions the carnival event as an event where different possibilities can be seen apart from those normally thought. This was tested in both the spatial analysis from Chapter Four and in the results of Chapter Five. In Chapter Four, participants were seen to appropriate and use the physical spaces in different ways than they were regularly used during the ordinary business hours of the poetry slam. These actions reflect different possibilities being pursued during the event itself which fits this aspect of carnival. In Chapter Five, the case for critical utopia did have some limitations, but also had other evidence that it did occur. Interviewees were exposed to diverse views. Their existing beliefs were affirmed and others were considered. Nevertheless, few indicated that experiencing the poetry slam had a direct influence on changing their views or affecting their political actions outside the poetry slam, although one interviewee did say that being exposed to poetry slams made her want to choreograph dances to go with poems which could be considered a new artistic possibility she was opened to through involvement in the poetry slam.

While the critical utopia aspect of carnival that Gardiner conceptualized had some limits in this study, the other reasons for viewing the poetry slam as carnivalesque did emerge. Remaining open to all participants, avoiding too much systematization through a flexible system of judging, maintaining freedom of speech, and just providing a place for the collective enjoyment of art qualify the poetry slam to be seen as a contemporary example of carnivalesque resistance. The poetry slam provides a space outside the flow of everyday life where a different set of rules are in play. And because there was little care about how wealthy, educated, or experienced a person is, the everyday social hierarchy is leveled; only performance matters.

As with any study, these results do have limitations that must be stated. As mentioned in Chapter Two, purposive sampling was used to recruit interviewees, which indicates that results from this sample are not generalizable, though they do give a starting point to understanding poetry slam culture. Those who were interviewed tended to be people that participated as poets, judges, or hosts which may have led to missing out on the perspectives of those who come but do not want to participate beyond the level of audience member. The short time frame for observing and interviewing also provided a limitation. By limiting observation to a few different occasions at each location and recruiting during a limited time span, the full range of activity possible at the poetry slam may have been missed. Also, while having two poetry slams as cases did allow for some comparison, a full exploration of the differences that can arise between different poetry slams and how they affect the execution of the poetry slam might have revealed more significant variances in how participants are engaged depending on the local culture and the ties to the national and world poetry slam scene.

Further study of poetry slams and resistance could take multiple approaches. A study focused on the content of the poems performed could be done to see if the wording of the poems

shows resistance. This was originally considered as a part of this research project but was not included due to time constraints on the researcher and because sufficient data was gathered through the chosen methodology to test our hypothesis. A content analysis of the poems, if performed longitudinally could also look at whether the competitions show bias to certain topics or towards types of poets. Future research could also delve more specifically into how identity politics related to race, ethnicity, gender, and orientation affect the resistance shown in the poetry slam. Another possible approach would be to expand the spatial analysis of the slam and to see how the embodied spatial practices of a greater number of poetry slams compare. In Chapter Four's spatial analysis, the movements and behaviors were discussed in a general sense, but further analysis of specific embodied performances of individuals in the poetry slam could show how people manifest resistance in a material way through their movements and performances on the stage. Future research on carnival as a contemporary form of resistance could also take multiple tacts. The mixed results for seeing carnival as a critical utopia in regards to the poetry slam indicates that carnival's role as a critical utopia may need further clarification by looking to see if, in other situations that are known to be carnivalesque, there are indications that these events involve the opening up to new possibilities that critical utopia entails. Also, a further refining of what the constituent parts of carnival are within specific cases could also lead to a greater understanding of resistance.

The current study has sought to remain true to the Bakhtinian principle of dialogue. By observing the ongoing interactions at poetry slams, talking with participants, reading and discussing different theories, and writing and rewriting this thesis, dialogue has continued to progress on multiple levels to reach this point. By studying poetry slams as a place for carnivalesque resistance, this research shows that there can be events like these at spaces and

times which provide safe havens from the pressures of power that permeate the social hierarchies of everyday life. The poetry slam is an event meant to resist academic control of what poetry is supposed to be while simultaneously providing a platform for people to protest other issues. For those interested in issues of power and resistance, this study highlights examples of a type of event that creates resistance and also builds on the conceptual tools provided by Bakhtin. The concept of carnival and its composite criteria offer a tool that could be gainfully applied in further areas of resistance. Through this study, I became aware of elements of the carnivalesque that I encountered in my own life. In kung fu classes and as part of the audience at Broncos games, I have seen people interact freely and openly with one another. I've seen playful mocking of social hierarchy. The full carnival was not always present in every situation, but the carnivalesque elements I saw livened up each occasion. So although a full carnival may not be occurring in every case, carnivalesque elements may still be present in other situations that could benefit from similar analyses. Everyday life still goes on with work, school, and home life, but these moments when the carnivalesque seeps in prepare people for the possibilities of the days to come.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2003. *The meanings of social life: a cultural sociology*. Oxford University Press US.

Allor, M. 2006. "Locating cultural activity: The 'main' as chronotope and heterotopia." *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 1(1).

Attride-Stirling, J. 2001. "Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research." *Qualitative Research* 1(3):385.

Bakhtin, M. M., Michael Holquist, and Caryl Emerson. 1986. *Speech genres and other late essays*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. M., Michael Holquist, and Vadim Liapunov. 1990. *Art and answerability early philosophical essays*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1968. *Rabelais and his world*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1973. *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1981. *The dialogic imagination*. edited by Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Baxter, Leslie A. 2004. "A Tale of Two Voices: Relational Dialectics Theory." *Journal of Family Communication* 4(3/4):181–92.

Baxter, Leslie A., and Barbara M. Montgomery. 1996. *Relating: dialogues and dialectics*. Guilford Press.

Becker, Howard Saul. 1982. *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bouissac, Paul. 1990. "The profanation of the sacred in circus clown performances." Pp. 194–
207 in *By means of performance: intercultural studies of theatre and ritual*, edited by
Richard Schechner and Willa Appel. Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." Retrieved December 9, 2010
(http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/bourdieu-forms-
capital.htm).

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using thematic analysis in psychology."
Qualitative Research in Psychology 3(2):77–101.

Brewer, John D. 2000. *Ethnography*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

de Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California
Press.

Confucius. 1907. *The sayings of Confucius*. J. Murray.

Craig, Ailsa, and Sébastien Dubois. 2010. "Between art and money: The social space of public
readings in contemporary poetry economies and careers." *Poetics* 38(5):441–60.

Creswell, John W. 2007. *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five
approaches*. SAGE.

DeNora, Tia. 2000. *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dickinson, Greg. 2002. "Joe's rhetoric: finding authenticity at starbucks." *RSQ: Rhetoric
Society Quarterly* 32(4):5–27.

Dillard, Scott. 2002. "The art of performing poetry: Festivals, slams, and americans' favorite
poem project events." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 22(3):217–27.

Gardiner, Michael. 1992. "Bakhtin's Carnival: Utopia as Critique." *Utopian Studies* 3(2):21–49.

Gardiner, Michael. 2000. *Critiques of everyday life*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Gardiner, Michael. 2002. *The dialogics of critique M.M. Bakhtin and the theory of ideology*. Taylor & Francis e-Library ed. London: Routledge. Retrieved January 5, 2011 (http://0-www.netLibrary.com.catalog.library.colostate.edu/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=69238).

Gilman, Lisa. 2009. "Genre, Agency, and Meaning in the Analysis of Complex Performances: The Case of a Malawian Political Rally." *Journal of American Folklore* 122(485):335–62.

Glazner, Gary Mex. 2000. *Poetry Slam the Competitive Art of Performance Poetry*. San Francisco: Publishers Group West.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Guest, Greg, Arwen Bunce, and Laura Johnson. 2006. "How Many Interviews Are Enough?" *Field Methods* 18(1):59–82.

Hufford, Mary T. 2010. "Carnival Time in the Kingdom of Coal." *Social Identities* 16(4):559–81.

Kohn, Nathaniel, and Rebecca Cain. 2005. "Baring Withness: Community, Performance, and the Uncommon in and around the Virginia Theatre in Champaign, Illinois." *Qualitative Inquiry* 11(3):351–68.

Ladin, Jay. 1999. "Fleshing Out the Chronotope." in *Critical Essays on Mikhail Bakhtin*, edited by Caryl Emerson. New York: G.K. Hall & Co.

Morris, Brian. 2004. "What we talk about when we talk about 'walking in the city'." *Cultural Studies* 18(5):675–97.

Morson, Gary Saul, and Caryl Emerson. 1990. *Creations of a Prosaics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Universtiy Press.

Neuman, William Lawrence. 2006. *Social research methods*. 6th ed. Pearson.

Nielsen, Greg. 2000. "Looking Back on the Subject: Mead and Bakhtin on Reflexivity and the

    Political." Pp. pp. 142–163 in *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and Social*

    Theory, edited by Craig Brandist and Galin Tihanov. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc.

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. 1896. *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*.

    MacMillan and Company.

Paul, Bradley. 2010. *The Animals All Are Gathering*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Pezzullo, Phaedra C. 2007. *Toxic tourism: rhetorics of pollution, travel, and environmental*

    justice. University of Alabama Press.

Poetry Slam, Inc. 2007. "Venue Certification." *Poetry Slam, Inc.* Retrieved January 22, 2011

    (http://www.poetryslam.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13:venue-

    certification&catid=7:frequently-asked-questions&Itemid=25#39).

Purcell, Mark. 2002. "Excavating Lefebvre: the right to the city and its urban politics of the

    inhabitant." *GeoJournal* 58(2/3):99–108.

Rubin, Jeffrey W. 1995. "Defining Resistance: Contested Interpretations of Everyday Acts."

    Studies in Law 15(1):237–60.

Schechner, Richard 1934-. 2003. *Performance theory*. Rev and expanded ed., with a new

    preface by the author, [Routledge classics ed.]. London ;: Routledge.

Simonsen, Kirsten. 2005. "Bodies, Sensations, Space and Time: The Contribution from Henri

    Lefebvre." *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 87(1):1–14.

Smith, Marc Kelly, and Joe Kraynak. 2009. *Stage a Poetry Slam: Creating Performance Poetry*

    Events. Sourcebooks, Inc.

Stallybrass, Peter, and Allon White. 1986. *The politics and poetics of transgression*. Cornell University Press.

Stam, Robert. 1989. *Subversive pleasures Bakhtin, cultural criticism, and film*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Stewart, Jessie, and Greg Dickinson. 2008. "Enunciating locality in the postmodern suburb: FlatIron Crossing and the Colorado lifestyle." *Western Journal of Communication* 72(3):280–307.

Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. 2001. *Practices of looking an introduction to visual culture*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

Thomas, Jim. 1993. *Doing critical ethnography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Vivoni, Francisco. 2009. "Spots of spatial desire: skateparks, skateplazas, and urban politics." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 33(2):130–49.

Voloshinov, V. N. 1994. "Constructing a Sociological Poetics." Pp. 160–74 in *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, edited by Pam Morris. New York, NY: Glossary Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd.

Watson, James L., and Melissa L. Caldwell, eds. 2005. *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating: A Reader*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Interview Guide and Research Questions for Interviews with Poetry Slam Participants

Introductory Statement:

1) Is this your first poetry slam or have you been to one before?
   - How did you first get involved in Poetry Slams?
   - What got you involved in going to the poetry slam?
   - Describe what the poetry slam means to you?

2) Why do you participate in poetry slams?
   - What do you like about poetry slams?
   - Can you give five words that best describe the poetry slam for you?

3) How do you think the poetry slam is organized? In what ways have you been involved in poetry slams?
   - Major roles: audience, judge, performer, host
   - Other roles: scorekeeper, setup helper

4) Who do you go with to poetry slams?
   - Do you meet up with friends at the poetry slam?
   - Have you met new people at the poetry slam?
   - How have your friends been involved in the poetry slam?

Transition: I would like to turn to some questions about how you see poetry slams, what they're really like.

5) How has the poetry slam affected you?
   - Has it influenced you in entertainment choices?
   - Has it influenced you in your own writing?

5) Do you see the poetry slam as a competitive event?
   - In what ways does the poetry slam serve as a competition?
   - In what ways does the poetry slam not serve as a competition?
   - How much do you feel that you can influence the competition?
   - How much do you feel others can influence the competition?

6) What topics do poets tend to focus on at the poetry slam?
   - Are there topics that are more prominent in the competition?
   - Are there topics that you prefer? Dislike? Give examples if possible?
   - Does the content or the presentation of the poem appeal more to you?

6) Do you see poetry slams as political events?
   - In other words, do people participate in them because they have a political side to them?

- Are topics of inequality related to wealth, race, ethnicity, and gender addressed in the poetry slam? If so, how?
- Have discussions of inequality during the poetry slam influenced your personal views? If so, how?
- Have discussions of inequality during the poetry slam influenced your actions? If so, how?

7) Would you say you are a political person?
- Are you currently involved in political action?
- Have you participated in political action in the past?

8) What else do you think is important to understand about poetry slams that we haven't talked about?

9) Demographic questions
- Age, Sex, Racial/Ethnic self-identification
- Length of involvement with poetry slams